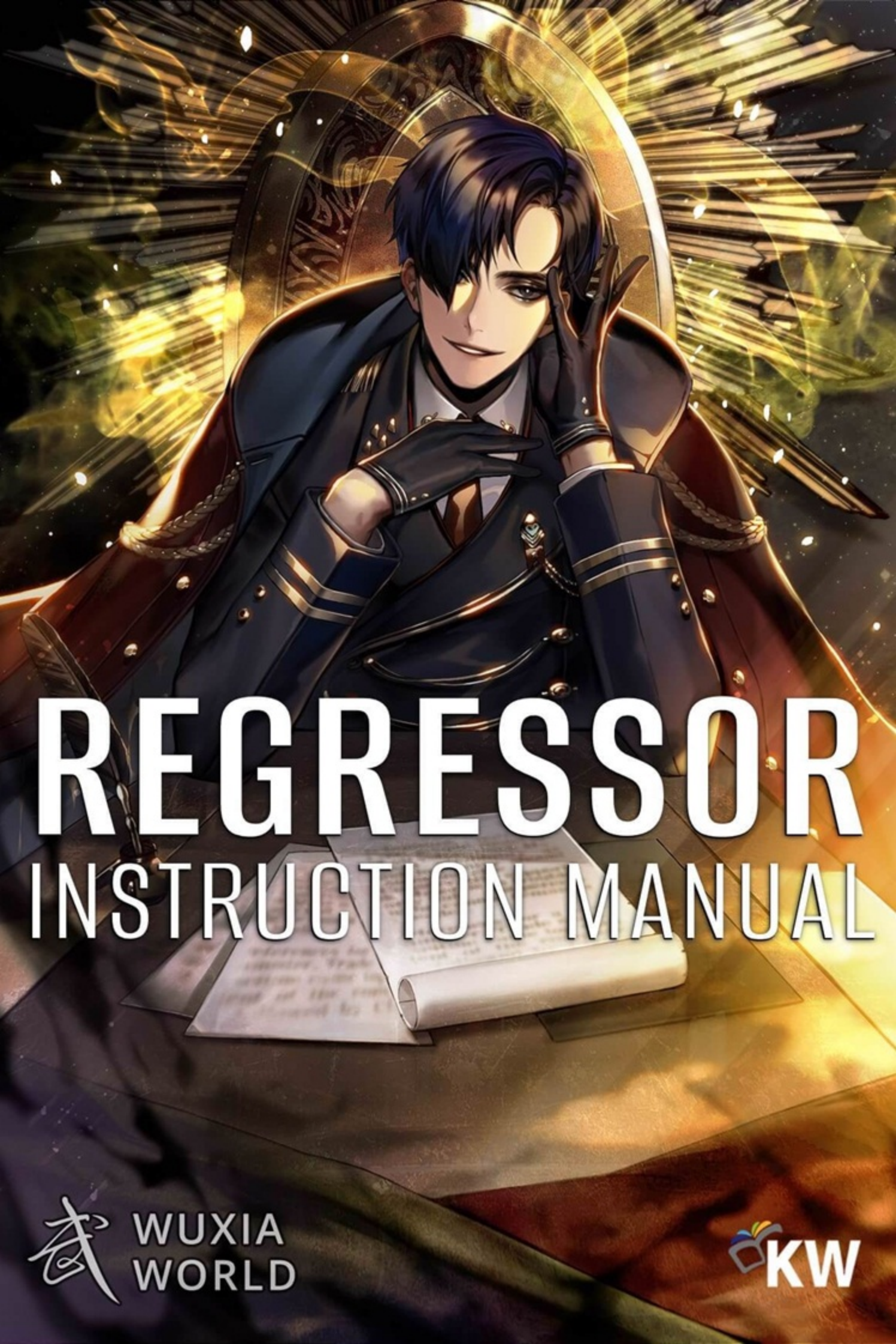
REGRESSOR
INSTRUCTION MANUAL
WUXIA WORLD
KW

REGRESSOR INSTRUCTION MANUAL

– 회귀자 사용설명서 –

- VOLUME 19 -

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[WUXIAWORLD]

CHAPTER 901
SERA (1)

'This bastard… is seriously… '

'I was pretty hard on him as well.'

[I had a drink… Today… Today, I would like to offer a truly sincere apology. It's fine… if you don't accept my apology, but Mr. Ki-Young… just remember that I'm being serious. I won't explain what happened. I just want to tell you that I regret my decision. You may not like my apology… I've been thinking about it day and night… I did my best and thought hard about it. These aren't just empty words. I hope you'll feel my sincerity. I'm sorry…]

Kim Hyun-Sung was spouting a bunch of nonsense, so he had clearly drunk a lot.

I had no idea just how much he drank to become *this* drunk.

Had he drunk a ten-thousand-year-old liquor brewed by a dragon? Actually, it wasn't that important. What mattered here was the possibility that this cheesy post would stay on the first page of Kim Hyun-Sung's dark history rather than staying as a sincere apology.

Naturally, the netizens immediately wrote comments, so I had to wrap up our little party.

'This is tiring, damn it.'

First, I needed to check the reply he sent to me last night.

[Please stop.]

This was the message I had sent him.

[I'm sorry…]

And this was his reply. I had to reply. I looked really cold-hearted here.

[I just needed some time.]

'Yeah, I needed some time… Actually, I think I'm over it… but you acted so disgracefully. I'm doing this to discipline you. You understand, right?'

His post was actually working, which was absurd.

I wouldn't say that his "sincerity" was working; he actually appeared kind of pitiful by making that post.

This wasn't the best example, but it was similar to a long-term couple pitying each other.

Kim Hyun-Sung and I had experienced many things together.

He always looked so big in my eyes, so this was the first time he looked so pitiful.

I looked at him using the telescope yesterday, and he looked pretty horrible.

I understood his feelings.

I was sure he was shocked because he struggled even more than children when it came to building relationships with people. His post sounded like we were breaking up, and from my posts on Benigoagram, it seemed like everyone was happy except him.

Those posts… Kim Hyung-Sung was afraid of becoming distant from his close friend, with whom he had a special bond. As always, he had to rely on alcohol to face the emotional turmoil of making a mistake and feeling heartbroken about it.

'I feel bad for him.'

One would be able to feel the heartbreak that Kim Hyun-Sung was going through by imagining someone cooped up in their room for a long time to pass an exam. Upon passing the exam, that certain someone would then try to hang out with their friends only to find out that they had cut ties with them.

Of course, Kim Hyun-Sung had done the right thing by making *that* decision.

[Okay, I'll be waiting. I'm sorry.]

'Of course, you should wait.'

[Also, I think it's best if you delete your Benigoagram account.]

This way, he wouldn't make another mistake.

[Okay… Mr. Ki-Young. Have a good day.]

[Thank you. ^^]

[I'm sorry. If I did something wrong…]

[*Ah*, it's nothing like that. I'm looking forward to the result of the task I assigned to you.]

This emoticon was going to give him PTSD. It was kind of funny seeing him act like a scorched child afraid of fire, but he needed to experience something like this so that he would do better in the future.

I leaned halfway out of bed and heard a familiar voice.

"O-Oppa, are you awake?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"Yeah. Did you sleep well?" I asked.

"Y-Yes," Jung Ha-Yan replied.

"You didn't have trouble sleeping?" I asked.

"No," Jung Ha-Yan answered.

'I slept well, too.'

What was this tent made out of, and why was there furniture here?

There was a bed rather than a sleeping bag. I saw a water fountain, and even the table that was provided for me to take care of my business looked fancy. The blanket made with excellent materials was softer than the blanket in my room.

Now that I thought about it…

"*Ah!* O-O-Oppa," Jung Ha-Yan called out, interrupting my train of thought.

"Yeah?" I answered.

"M-Miss Kim Mi-Young called. She said she wanted to talk to you about work…" Jung Ha-Yan informed me.

"I'll call her now," I said.

"A-Also, I prepared food for you. Y-You can come out when you're done with your call," Jung Ha-Yan added.

Except for the fact that I woke up kind of late, this morning was no different from the mornings I often spent at the guild.

"Miss Kim Mi-Young," I greeted.

- Good morning, sir.

"I heard you wanted to talk to me about something…" I said.

- I took care of the guild master's post, just as you asked. We're trying to stop the screenshots of the posts from spreading on Benigoa Net, but we can't take care of the related posts that are discussing it. I called to ask your opinion on asking Mr. Max to take total control.

"*Ah*, I see. Well, I don't think that's necessary. Just keep an eye out for the posts made by the press. Then, just take care of the silly posts and posts with ridiculous assumptions," I ordered.

- Thank you for your confirmation, sir.

"Thank you for always working so hard, Miss Kim Mi-Young," I said.

- I'm simply doing my job.

Once Miss Kim Mi-Young was done with her yesterday's report, coffee and newspaper were placed on the table before me. Honestly, I could use my hand mirror

to read the news, but reading it from a newspaper felt completely different.

When I went outside, I saw Jung Ha-Yan sitting at an outdoor table. It was a picturesque sight, as the table was on beautiful green grass. I felt kind of embarrassed coming out in my pajamas, but it probably didn't matter.

"What about the others?" I asked.

"T-They've eaten already, and you woke up kind of late… I didn't wake you up because you seemed kind of tired…" Jung Ha-Yan replied.

"I must've slept a little too long," I commented.

"I-I haven't eaten yet because I wanted to eat with you…" Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

"Really? Thanks," I said.

Honestly, I was convinced that Jung Ha-Yan only managed to wait for me, as she didn't receive any tasks. However, her words still put me in a good mood. Eating alone wasn't bad, but this wasn't bad either. It was like I was enjoying my everyday life.

Although we were in a different location, we had experienced many extraordinary things recently, so I had been missing moments like waking up later than usual, drinking coffee, and eating while reading the newspaper.

"I heard the other party prepared the food. T-That man, Rafael, supposedly cooked the food," Jung Ha-Yan said.

'He's pretty attentive.'

I looked around and saw that the others were in the middle of training.

They had woken up so early to start training that it felt like the party last night had never happened at all.

Rafael and Thronus were exchanging moves with their swords.

Cherubim and the hunting dog were talking to each other while swinging their swords at each other.

I had no idea what they were talking about, but they were covered in sweat, so it seemed that they had been sparring for quite a while now.

Just then, I saw Rafael swinging his sword powerfully. In response, Thronus spread his wings and swung his greatsword, but Rafael easily blocked Thronus' attacks.

'Rafael grew stronger as well.'

Back then, Rafael couldn't really control his power, and he had been taking advantage of that fact by using it to corner his enemies.

I could tell that his experience in battle had honed his attacks, and my jaw dropped unknowingly while I was staring at him. He wasn't as graceful as Kim Hyun-Sung, but it felt like Rafael was moving according to his personality. His style wasn't fancy, and it seemed like he had given up on making his movements graceful and fancy upon realizing that his swordsmanship would never reach Kim Hyun-Sung's level.

"*Hyah!*" Thronus exclaimed as if he was trying to show me something upon noticing that I was staring at him.

"*Eek!*" Thronus shrieked and rolled on the ground upon being countered by Rafael.

Thronus looked pretty cool when he kicked off of the ground to recover his balance.

If Thronus were himself a long time ago, he would be much stronger.

On the other side, Lee Joo-Hyuk and Cherubim were talking to each other nonstop.

Cherubim swung his scythe nonstop, but Lee Joo-Hyuk blocked all of his attacks.

"That's enough," Lee Joo-Hyuk said.

"Okay. *Whoo…*"

"I understand your level now, Cherubim," Lee Joo-Hyuk said.

"How was it?" Cherubim asked.

"And it's so low that it's extremely boring. I was so bored I felt like dying," Lee Joo-Hyuk answered.

“What…?”

“You should train like you’re in the middle of a battlefield. If you had truly learned something from the Mercenary Queen, then you should know what I’m talking about,” Lee Joo-Hyuk said.

“…”

“What’s training for you?” Lee Joo-Hyuk asked.

“What?” Cherubim asked.

“For me… training is killing,” Lee Joo-Hyuk said.

‘Lee Joo-Hyuk, stop teaching him strange things.’

“*Haha*… you’re a strange one…”

‘Stop encouraging him, guys.’

“Come. I’ll be your opponent for now,” Lee Joo-Hyuk ordered.

The two continued their sparring.

I thought it was too much to have Lee Joo-Hyuk train Cherubim, but they weren’t that bad of a pair. Perhaps it was because he wasn’t going easy, but Cherubim looked really surprised. He claimed to be Rafael’s rival, and I could tell that he had been working hard to overcome his limits.

Rafael had a small crossbow in one hand to create a variable.

Lee Joo-Hyuk was most likely the reason behind Rafael’s rapid growth.

‘He’s stronger than I thought.’

Cherubim couldn’t counterattack at all. In the end, Lee Joo-Hyuk grabbed Cherubim’s long hair, and I chuckled when I saw Cherubim hanging from Lee Joo-Hyuk’s hand.

While my eyes were on him, Thronus and Rafael wrapped up their training and approached me.

“How was it, Mr. Rafael?” I asked.

“It was great, hyung. He just has to train consistently, and I think he’ll become even stronger… It seems like he’s standing before a wall… but I think the problem lies with the training method rather than with Thronus,” Rafael replied.

“What?”

“I know because I learned from him as well. The guild master isn’t considerate of his students,” Rafael answered.

‘Really?’

“I’m not denying the fact that he’s a genius swordsman, but his training method is too much for a child to handle. It takes a separate talent to teach someone. It’s nothing serious, so you don’t have to worry about it… By the way, did you guys enjoy them?” Rafael asked.

“Yes, thanks to you,” I answered.

“I-I-It was delicious,” Jung Ha-Yan answered.

“Mr. Rafael, I’d like to talk to you in detail about Thronus…” I requested.

‘I can… see what he’s talking about. It’s not like someone will become a genius just by learning magic from Ha-Yan.’

“Thronus, come here and sit, too…” I told him.

‘Honestly, Hyun-Sung was pretty frustrated with Thronus as well. He said something like Thronus doesn’t have talent and that he wasn’t that useful.’

I was kind of worried because I thought he’d grow in the wrong direction.

“H-H-How’s Sera doing?” Jung Ha-Yan chimed in.

It was an unexpected question, as Jung Ha-Yan had never really been interested in Seraphim. She had been making Han Sora take care of Seraphim most of the time rather than training him.

I reckoned Jung Ha-Yan had decided to ask that question, as I had been talking about Thronus for quite a while now.

"*Ah*, I think it's because if you look at him yourself, Miss Jung Ha-Yan. Lee Joo-Hyuk has decided to take care of Seraphim…" Rafael replied.

Seraphim and Lee Joo-Hyuk were actually dueling right now.

"Come at me, kid," Lee Joo-Hyuk said.

Seraphim looked pretty serious with a sword in his tiny hands.

He seemed to have noticed that we were watching them because he bit his lips, looking quite nervous.

"*Hyaaaah!*" Seraphim shouted and swung his sword with all his might. He swung it so hard that the sword flew out of his hand. It was a mistake that not even beginners would make. To make things worse, the sword flew toward my table.

'Is he trying to assassinate me or something?'

I didn't bother dodging, as I knew that the sword was going to get blocked, anyway.

Clang!

As expected, the sword bounced off the barrier.

"W-What do you think you're doing?!" Jung Ha-Yan yelled.

CHAPTER 902
SERA (2)

"W-W-What do you think you're doing?!"

It had been a while since I saw Jung Ha-Yan so angry.

The mood suddenly became tense because of Jung Ha-Yan's sudden shout. Rafael's party looked particularly shocked. Han Sora had seen Jung Ha-Yan's angry side many times before, but Rafael's party was different.

The mages were particularly astounded, and they stared at the ongoing situation with wide eyes.

Jung Ha-Yan's shy and awkward smile was replaced by a frown as she glared at Seraphim. Those mages seemed like they wanted to know whether what they were seeing was actually happening or not.

This was kind of different, but I was sure people would react the same upon hearing me yell. I understood how they felt because Jung Ha-Yan was like an idol to them, and they couldn't have imagined that she could raise her voice like that.

"I-I-I asked what you think you're doing!" Jung Ha-Yan repeated. Honestly, I also never imagined Jung Ha-Yan could raise her voice like that.

In some ways, this incident could be considered a small incident, but it seemed to have brought back bad memories for Jung Ha-Yan.

I became especially frail as an aftermath of everything, and Kim Hyun-Sung wasn't the only one worried about my safety. If anything, Jung Ha-Yan was in a worse situation than him.

'But I don't think that's the reason why she's acting this way.'

To be honest, there was no way Seraphim's attack would hurt me, and it wasn't like I got injured. This was just a tiny incident that could easily be glossed over.

"*Ah, ah… ah…*"

"S-Speak properly…" Jung Ha-Yan ordered.

Seraphim's face turned pale as he faced Jung Ha-Yan's fury. He had never been the assertive type, so he was blanking out. I was certain that this was the most hopeless situation for kids with a unique habit related to craving for love.

"*Ugh…* I-I-I'm… I'm…" Seraphim stuttered.

"*Eeeek!*" Jung Ha-Yan screeched.

Tears instantly filled Seraphim's large eyes, and I felt bad for him because he was trying his best not to shed tears. He probably thought that the situation would get worse if he cried, or he could also be worried that Santa might not bring him a gift.

"S-So annoying. I-I'm so… annoyed… *Heuk*…"

'Why are you crying?'

"*Hiccup…* I'm annoyed… *Hiccup…* I think he really is a dummy…" Jung Ha-Yan said.

"…"

"*Hiccup…* Y-You can't even do that properly… A-Apologize to him right now… Tell him that you're sorry!" Jung Ha-Yan shouted.

"I-I'm… sorry… Father…" Seraphim mumbled.

"C-Come over here and apologize!" Jung Ha-Yan yelled.

"I'm sorry… Father…" Seraphim repeated.

When I recalled what Seraphim had done in the past, I felt like cornering him with Jung Ha-Yan or cheering her on, but too many people were watching, so I couldn't do that.

It was an honest mistake as well.

As a saint—no, as a father, I had to overlook this to maintain a good image, right?

When Seraphim tensed up, Cherubim, Thronus, and even Dominions tensed up as well.

I had to do something about this mood.

“It’s fine, Ha-Yan. Come here, Sera,” I told him.

“…”

“What happened? Sera, why are you crying? Miss Jung Ha-Yan? What’s wrong with him…”

‘I’m glad you’re here, Sora.’

“E-Explain… the situation… yourself!” Jung Ha-Yan shouted.

‘Stop Ha-Yan for me.’

“I-I… I… accidentally let go… of my sword… and it flew toward Father… *Heuk… kgh…*” Seraphim stammered and cried.

People would often cry harder whenever they had someone to lean on, and Seraphim cried even louder upon seeing Han Sora.

Han Sora was shocked. I had always been the one asking her for her help, but she was asking for my help this time.

Based on her expression, it seemed like she was taking Seraphim’s side, but she seemed worried about the consequences of protecting him.

It was pretty obvious. If Han Sora defended Seraphim, Jung Ha-Yan would become even angrier.

Unlike me, Han Sora liked Seraphim a lot, and she was worried about Seraphim.

It couldn’t be helped, as Han Sora had raised Seraphim as if he were her own child.

Han Sora looked sad, and she looked like she wanted to pull him out of this hellish situation as quickly as possible.

I was also starting to feel uncomfortable because the mood was starting to turn awkward.

“I’m annoyed… I’m really annoyed… Why is he…” Jung Ha-Yan complained.

“I’m sorry… Mother. I…” Cherubim chimed in.

“H-How… dare you try to get involved? I-It’s rude! So rude! H-How dare you talk… when the adults are talking!” Jung Ha-Yan shouted.

Cherubim immediately went silent.

This was the power of an adult, and Jung Ha-Yan was utilizing it well…

“I-Is that what… Cha Hee-Ra taught you?” Jung Ha-Yan questioned.

What an unexpected insult.

“That’s—” Cherubim muttered.

“S-S-Shut up! Just shut up… *Hiccup*… How dare you… make eye contact with me?!” Jung Ha-Yan yelled.

“Ha-Yan, it’s fine. Come here and calm down…” I told Jung Ha-Yan.

“I’m… going to go take care of some things, hyung,” Rafael said.

‘I’m glad our Rafael is quick-witted. While you’re at it, take your friends away, who are obviously enjoying this family drama. That’s right. Good job.’

In the end, Han Sora, Jung Ha-Yan, Seraphim, and I were left on our own devices in this awkward situation.

The others realized that something strange was going on, so they became cautious as if there were a bomb that was about to explode.

Meanwhile, Jung Ha-Yan was still glaring at Seraphim, who was still crying.

The Holy Sword Warrior party cast a strange gaze at Jung Ha-Yan, but I believed the fundamental problem lies elsewhere. Jung Ha-Yan wasn’t strange, and Seraphim

hadn't done anything strange as well.

I knew the answer to this conundrum.

'I'm the problem.'

The answer was simple: I was the culprit.

There was no need to blame anyone else for it.

My attitude toward Seraphim so far was the problem, and it was all because I had never really taken Seraphim's side nor shown any affection toward him in front of Jung Ha-Yan.

I had never really thought much about it, as I assumed Jung Ha-Yan wasn't fond of him either, but I was sure something like this was stressing out Jung Ha-Yan.

Seraphim seemed incompetent, as he was especially behind compared to the other children. Moreover, Jung Ha-Yan had to have seen me receiving reports from Thronus and Cherubim. I had been showing my affection toward them, too.

Rather than saying that Seraphim's mistake was the root of the problem here, it'd be more accurate to say that the root of the problem was the stress that had been accumulating inside Jung Ha-Yan.

When it exploded, this incident occurred. It made sense, as it would be strange for anyone to get angry at such an insignificant event.

'She must be somewhat fond of him.'

If Jung Ha-Yan couldn't care less about Seraphim, she wouldn't have scolded him.

I was sure Jung Ha-Yan had yet to realize it, but she had to be interested in Seraphim. Otherwise, she wouldn't have cared about how he had been doing these days or how his training was going.

It was possible that Jung Ha-Yan wanted me to love Seraphim as well, but she was just having a hard time expressing that desire.

Of course, I knew Jung Ha-Yan had never really been a sociable person and that she

would always have a hard time handling situations like this. We were quite similar but drastically different at the same time.

Just like her, I didn't really have a normal childhood, but I was good at pretending that it was the opposite.

However…

'Jung Ha-Yan has never really done anything like that.'

I managed to keep going because of Yul-Ha, but Jung Ha-Yan was abandoned by her parents and older sisters, so what could she have done?

All she could do was pretend like she didn't exist, and I was sure she didn't have the will to improve her situation. She had to have done nothing but cower to avoid being noticed.

Unfortunately, there was nothing she could learn from the continent when it came to the social skills department.

Jung Ha-Yan had probably gotten a hint of it, but it was hard to put into practice, especially for someone like her.

She was thinking about what she wanted, but she couldn't put it into action. Of course, there was also a chance that she didn't know the answer to her conundrum.

Humans would always learn a ton through experience, and this was especially true for our one-trick Ha-Yan.

'Honestly, I'm not so sure, either. Damn it, I don't even know where to start.'

'Let's just handle this first.'

"It's fine, Ha-Yan. I didn't get hurt, and Sera just made a mistake. The mistake happened during training and things like this happen from time to time. You don't have to be so sensitive about it. Cheer up, Sera," I said.

"H-He makes mistakes… every day. Isn't he tired of it? H-He can't even do this homework properly… and he doesn't even know how to cast spells or use a sword," Jung Ha-Yan grumbled.

'You're going to hurt him.'

"That's not all. He doesn't know how to do anything. I-I read the entry about their previous quest… and Sera only made mistakes. He didn't do anything at all… and he even got himself in danger. H-He's really stupid… *Hiccup*…" Jung Ha-Yan continued.

'You read that, too?'

"Every kid is different," I commented.

"H-He's right, Miss Jung Ha-Yan. Sera is doing his best as well. You have no idea how hard he works…" Han Sora chimed in.

'Great support, Sora. I can see that you're desperate as well.'

"I'm sure he'll do well someday, right?" I asked.

"…"

"Right, Sera? You can do well, right? How about you promise me?" Sora asked.

"Y-Yes… *Heuk…* I can do well," Sera answered.

"N-Nothing will change… just by doing your best… You said the same thing last time… You say you're going to do your best every day… but nothing has changed. In the end, you're the same every day. It's a meaningless promise…" Jung Ha-Yan complained.

"…"

"Y-You have to show results… You have to… J-Just doing your best isn't enough… b-because…" Jung Ha-Yan paused.

'Because I like competent people?'

"Competent… You have to be competent…" Jung Ha-Yan added.

'You have to be competent to be loved?'

"Y-Y-You're so frustrating… You annoy me so much…" Jung Ha-Yan added.

"…"

The two of them were going to be heartbroken.

Honestly, there was something strange with me as well.

Jung Ha-Yan hadn't noticed, but I felt better seeing Seraphim cry.

At first, I had no plans of bringing him down with me. However, Cherubim brought him down with us, so I decided to simply ignore him from then on.

I was probably looking forward to this moment, and I was sure Cherubim had made a move earlier with this situation in mind.

I stared at Seraphim and saw his eyes darting around as if he had no idea where to look.

And that was when Jung Ha-Yan mumbled, "M-Maybe… I shouldn't have asked for Sera… Things would have been better if I had chosen the other children…"

"…"

"…"

I knew she didn't mean that, but I was sure that her words broke Seraphim's heart.

CHAPTER 903
SERA (3)

Just as I expected, Seraphim looked hopeless and indescribably sad. He had been telling himself to hold back his tears, but he no longer had the energy to do even that.

He cried so hard that his eyes resembled a faucet.

He sobbed and hiccuped while his limbs were trembling as if he were having a seizure. I was sure that he felt like his existence itself was being denied.

Seraphim wasn't the only one surprised. The other children seemed more tense than earlier. Actually, it was like they had stopped thinking. It was possible that they were blaming themselves, and they were probably assuming that they'd hear such words in the future.

The children were scared about the possibility that their existence itself would be denied. Dominions was probably thinking about Lee Ji-Hye, while Cherubim was probably thinking about Cha Hee-Ra.

They were thinking about the possibility of hearing such words.

Cherubim had been looking at Seraphim with a worried gaze, but now, he was quiet and was looking quite pale himself.

Meanwhile, Han Sora instinctively stood in Jung Ha-Yan's path. A magic barrier sprang up; it seemed that Han Sora was worried that Seraphim would hear Jung Ha-Yan's further words.

"M-Miss Jung Ha-Yan… that's…"

"We should've brought the other children…" Jung Ha-Yan said.

"D-Don't you think you're being too harsh? Sera is doing his best…"

"D-Doing your best is meaningless! Y-You know that as well… It's really frustrating,

Sora. Really frustrating… *Hiccup… Heuk…* I'm really frustrated… but I don't know what to do… I'm so frustrated…" Jung Ha-Yan complained.

"Still!" Han Sora shouted.

"I-I said I'm frustrated!" Jung Ha-Yan shouted as well.

"Miss Jung Ha-Yan!"

"I-I-I'm… frustrated!"

'Damn it. I don't even know when I should intervene.'

I suddenly felt like getting Han Sora involved was a bad idea.

Han Sora had always been an emotional person, but I felt like she was more emotional than usual in this matter.

Honestly, it seemed like Jung Ha-Yan was just speaking randomly earlier. She seemed to have spat every single word that came to her mind without thinking about it. She was frustrated, but she had no idea how to stop feeling frustrated except for cornering others.

"*Hiccup…* I don't even want to see him…" Jung Ha-Yan said.

"Please stop… Any more and—"

"I-It's really tiring… O-Oppa… *Hiccup… Heuk…"* Jung Ha-Yan cried.

"…"

'I should comfort her for now.'

"I think it's best if we talk about this later. Ha-Yan, how about you head in first?" I suggested.

"…"

"Or…"

“I-I’ll do that. I-I want to rest…” Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

Jung Ha-Yan tried her best not to look at Seraphim as she walked past him.

Han Sora grabbed Jung Ha-Yan’s hand, but the latter shook off her hand, which was shocking to me. Seraphim froze like a broken doll for quite a few moments before he cried his heart out once again.

Just as I started wondering about what I could say to comfort him, he turned and ran toward the forest.

‘Are you going to run away from home?’

“Cherubim, bring him back,” I ordered.

“Yes… Father,” Cherubim answered with a nod.

Seraphim wouldn’t be able to run away anywhere, as his home was wherever we were.

Han Sora glanced in the direction where Seraphim had disappeared before staring at me.

‘Yeah, I should talk to her as well.’

“How about a cup of coffee…”

“You’re really ruthless. You…” Han Sora paused.

“…”

“I knew you were crazy, but you crazier than I thought,” Han Sora added.

“I told you not to become fond of him. I didn’t bring him here because I wanted to. Weren’t you aware of that as well?” I asked.

“T-The situation is different now,” Han Sora argued.

“I believe I’ve done enough for him,” I told her.

I wasn't trying to avoid the conversation or give her an excuse because it was true that I had provided Seraphim with everything he needed.

Once could say that I had done the bare minimum by not sending him back or abandoning him. He was actually supposed to watch us down here from up there. It sounded a bit too ruthless, but he needed to be punished for his sin.

"I normally don't compromise," I said.

"I know that, but…"

"The fact that he's here and has been able to enjoy such a daily life is enough of a compromise for me. He has lost his memories, sure, but there's an indelible sin deep in his soul.

"I judge others that way, and I'm simply treating him like how I treat other people. Our Hyun-Sung almost died at his hands, too. He dared to touch what's mine, so don't you think that I'm going easy on him by giving him this kind of treatment?

"Don't you agree? It is a bit petty, but what I'm doing right now can't even be considered revenge," I explained.

"But still… he's still a child…" Han Sora muttered.

"Indifference is the best treatment that I can give him. I honestly wasn't planning on letting Ha-Yan take care of him…" I said.

"But you did," Han Sora argued.

"Now that I think about it, I think I made a mistake," I confessed.

'I shouldn't have let Jung Ha-Yan take care of him in the first place.'

I had to have allowed it, as I assumed that Jung Ha-Yan would quickly lose interest in Seraphim. However, it seemed that she had taken an interest in Seraphim upon hearing that Lee Ji-Hye and Cha Hee-Ra had accepted Dominions and Cherubim as if they were presents from me.

She felt like she was the only one without a gift, so she decided to take in Seraphim.

However, she made Han Sora take care of Seraphim, so I thought that she was no longer interested in him.

It seemed that I was wrong, and a part of me was kind of surprised. I thought Jung Ha-Yan had no sense of responsibility, but it seemed *that* feeling had bloomed inside of her the moment she accepted Sera.

'No, she could have just done that on impulse after throwing a tantrum.'

Of course, it was highly likely that I was wrong. There was a high chance that she made that decision after thinking about it thoroughly. I was quite certain of it, as Jung Ha-Yan had never really been the type of person to turn others into her subordinates.

Perhaps what had happened to her on Earth was the reason behind it, but Jung Ha-Yan never really made people her subordinate to ensure that she wouldn't get backstabbed.

In other words, Jung Ha-Yan definitely had a hard time accepting Seraphim, and it could have been a pretty dangerous challenge for her as well.

She had basically invited a new person into the space that only Han Sora and I were allowed to enter, so it was definitely a big decision on her end. She had to have pondered over it for a few days and asked Han Sora many questions about it.

"Let's talk about it over a cup of coffee. Oh yeah, it's not because of Seraphim. I'm concerned about Ha-Yan, so I want to know a few things from you. Let me start with my questions. The day… Ha-Yan decided to take Seraphim…" I paused.

"…"

"What were you two talking about?" I asked.

"We just… talk about many different things. I can't remember them all because we talked about so many things, but she seemed to be deeply contemplating something. She said she was excited… but scared at the same time about the idea.

"She did visit you in the end, but I recall her being really hesitant about it," Han Sora responded.

'Damn it.'

"And you didn't stop her," I said.

"I-I thought it would be helpful for Miss Jung Ha-Yan," Han Sora stuttered.

"…"

"I kind of regret it now, but I thought it would help her at the time," Han Sora said.

I perfectly understood Han Sora's feelings.

Jung Ha-Yan had probably lost interest in Seraphim when she realized that he wasn't as competent as the other children. I assumed that she had let go of him completely when I stopped showing interest in him or stopped showing any reaction toward him.

Honestly, it was hard to deduce what had transpired, and I couldn't see through her thoughts. If there were a Jung Ha-Yan Instruction Manual, I would read it, but there wasn't anything like that. We had been sharing information with each other, but how could she share something she wasn't even aware of… like her emotions for example?

"I think she's thinking that way now…" I mumbled.

"It's because she's been having a hard time these days," Han Sora commented.

"How was she in the beginning?" I asked.

"I think it's best if you look at it yourself," Han Sora suggested.

Han Sora handed me a Goddess' Hand Mirror, and it seemed that she had prepared the footage in advance, as the video played immediately when I accepted the hand mirror. The hand mirror depicted Seraphim when he was still a bit younger.

- L-Look, Sora. H-H-He's really small, right…

- Yes… he is.

- I-I'm Jung Ha-Yan… I-I'll be your mother from now on.

- M-Mother?

- H-He talked. Sora… he talked!

- It's said that they can talk as soon as they are born. The other children seem to be growing a little faster than him.

- He's cute.

- Hello, Mother.

- H-H-Hi…

- Don't hide and come out, Miss Jung Ha-Yan. You should greet him properly. Hi, Sera! I'm your auntie.

- H-Hello, Auntie…

- You should go hug your mother. You should come out as well, Miss Jung Ha-Yan. Yes, just keep doing that!

I was annoyed by Seraphim's genuinely happy smile, but Jung Ha-Yan looked so happy that I smiled without realizing it. To add to that, she looked surprisingly adorable as she hugged the tiny Seraphim. She was shy, but she patted his head nonstop with a bright smile.

She was obviously enjoying the moment.

- L-L-Look!

I was surprised to see her use magic to put on a show.

'Ah. So Seraphim was living a happier life than I thought at the start.'

- Wow…

- Y-You'll be able to do it soon, too, Seraphim.

'No, I don't think he can do that… Your magic is too fancy.'

“She’s a lot different now,” I commented.

“Yes, she’s become really different. She kind of struggled at first…” Han Sora said.

“…”

“Miss Jung Ha-Yan learned how to love from you, sir.” Han Sora pointed out.

“…”

“She’s ignorant of anything else,” Han Sora added.

That was how I learned how to love as well. Obviously, I knew *that* method was drastically from the social norms. Anyway, it had to be the reason behind all this. I had alternative plans, but Jung Ha-Yan had none. I could make a move, but she couldn’t.

I unknowingly started tapping my thigh, and I couldn’t stop remembering Jung Ha-Yan’s smiling face.

“Miss Jung Ha-Yan must be seeing herself in Seraphim,” Han Sora said.

“…”

“And that’s why she feels frustrated,” Han Sora added.

I looked at Jung Ha-Yan using the Telescope and saw her crying with a blanket over her head.

CHAPTER 904
SERA (4)

“Seraphim, Dominions, Thronus, and me.”

“…”

“Seraphim, Dominions, Thronus, and me…”

Seraphim, Dominions, Thronus, and me… Those were the words that had been going through my head the moment we were born here. I[1] wasn’t sure why, but I had been living while thinking of those words again and again.

I would mumble those words like a spell whenever I was in a dangerous situation. I had been doing that so many times that it had become a habit, and I was doing it again.

“Domi, can you track Sera’s location?” I asked.

“I’m not sure. He’s normally slow, so I don’t know why he’s so quick today. I can’t even detect him using my Detection Magic. I think… he’s really shocked,” Domi said.

“That’s because…”

I had to hold back my words because it wasn’t enough to explain the situation.

‘He was abandoned by his mother.’

Or…

‘Does she hate him?’

The reason didn’t matter. We were born to be loved and crave for love. We realized that since they were young. We felt that the moment we met our father. *Ah*, we were born to be loved by this man—we were born for him.

Our first encounter was really touching, and it made me feel many emotions.

It felt so emotional that I cried without realizing it.

I could tell we were blessed, and we felt like we were truly alive.

His kind hand, which patted my head, and his warm voice made me feel overjoyed.

They were just simple movements, but they satisfied me in a way that nothing else could do. Obviously, joy wasn't the only thing I felt.

At the time, Father's face became serious when he looked at Sera, who was holding my hand tightly. He didn't pat Sera's head. He didn't make eye contact with him, and he didn't say anything kind to him.

I recalled him doing nothing but looking down quietly at him as if he was pondering something. I wasn't sure whether Sera had noticed or not, but at the time, I got the feeling that Father was thinking about something scary.

"You were really crafty, Cherubim. Just as I expected," Father said.

"What?" I asked.

"It's nothing. Just rest for today. I need to think about what to do with you," Father instructed

"..."

"Welcome to the world," Father added.

I felt fear back then, and I would never forget the moment I felt that trace of fury in his eyes. The fear of being hated, abandoned, and not receiving any love from Father was scarier than anything else for me. Afterward, I never saw that expression on him again, but I realized something from that incident.

If he ended up abandoning us…

"There will be no reason for us to be born again," I mumbled.

"What?" Domi asked.

“Can you imagine Father and Mother abandoning us, Domi?” I asked.

“D-Don’t say such terrible things, Cheru,” Domi criticized.

“…”

“I-I’d rather die,” Domi added.

“I’m sure Sera is thinking of the same thing,” I told Domi.

“No, he hasn’t been abandoned yet. Father has never said anything about abandoning Sera. Our mothers said that Mother Jung Ha-Yan sometimes says things she doesn’t mean because she’s the type to overreact.

“Whenever that happens, It’s best to avoid her until she cools off. She wasn’t acting like her usual self today. Today was probably one of *those* days,” Domi explained.

“You think Sera thinks the same way as you?” I asked.

“I don’t know about that… but…” Domi paused.

“How would you feel if Mother said the same thing to you?” I questioned.

“Our mothers… are pretty strict, but…” Domi trailed off.

“If,” I emphasized.

“I-I’ll probably be sad, but saying that isn’t enough to describe how I would feel. Still, Father said to bring Sera back, so I’m sure he has something in mind… It means Father is worried about Sera.” Domi pointed out.

“Father doesn’t like Sera,” I told Domi.

“What?”

“It’s not because Sera’s growth is a little slower or because he’s incompetent. I think Father just doesn’t like Sera. I don’t know the reason either… but Father had never met Sera by himself.

“Father had never patted his head and had never told him that he loved him. He had

never made eye contact with him, either. When they were at the Blue Guild, Father only summoned Thro. Sera doesn't even know what Father's office looks like. Father had also never visited Sera during his training to see his results. They had never really talked, either…" I explained.

"…"

I had no idea why, but I'd probably never find out.

"Sera lives with Father," Domi said.

"…"

"So why…" Domi questioned.

"I don't know either. Mother never said anything, either. I did talk about it with Father once, but…" I paused.

"What did he say?" Domi asked.

"…"

"…"

"He told me not to cross the line," I answered.

"And…"

"That's it. It's possible that Father didn't want Sera, but Sera has been with me since he was born," I said.

Domi's face gradually turned serious, and it was possible that she was thinking about the fact that things weren't going swimmingly for us. The atmosphere felt heavy, and Domi's words that she'd rather die than be hated kept echoing in my head.

Sera was probably thinking of the same thing.

I thought I knew him well, but had I ever understood his feelings? I couldn't imagine what he was feeling right now. Just thinking about it was painful and terrifying to me, so it had to have been *really* painful for Sera.

I was sure he felt like his world was falling apart.

I ran faster and faster.

I wasn't out of breath, but I was having a hard time breathing.

"Sera!" I called out.

"S-Sera!" I repeated.

"Where are you, Seraphim?!" I shouted.

"Sera! Where are you?" I yelled.

"Y-You still can't locate him?" I asked.

"Hold on… let me try looking," Domi replied.

"Actually, let's split up," I suggested.

"Okay. I'll keep in touch," Domi said.

It took us quite a while, but we eventually found a tiny light that stuck out like a sore thumb in the vast, dense forest. I contacted Domi quietly and approached the small flickering light.

The light was coming from a small hole in a giant tree. I walked around the tree and saw Sera hidden in the tree. He had his head down, so I couldn't check his face, but his shaking shoulders told me his feelings.

'Should I talk to him? Has he noticed that I'm here?' Several thoughts popped into my mind, but I ended up patting Sera's head quietly.

"Are you okay, Sera?" I asked.

"…"

"Are you okay?" I repeated.

"…"

“I’m sure she didn’t mean it, so don’t be so bad, Sera,” I said.

“…”

“…”

“A-A-Are the others the same?” Sera asked.

“Yeah, our mothers did the same thing. They always said that… Mother Jung Ha-Yan seemed to really like you,” I replied.

“Really?” Sera asked.

“Yeah,” I answered.

“Father is worried as well,” I told him.

“…”

“Let’s go back,” I suggested.

“…”

“Staying here is not going to change anything. Let’s talk to Father together. Apologize to Mother Jung Ha-Yan. She’ll probably forgive you if you ask for forgiveness and tell her that you’ll do better from now on,” I advised.

“I-If… If I do that… you think it’ll get better?” Sera asked.

“I’ll try talking to her…” I said.

And that was when I heard Father’s voice.

- My lovely children.

I heard his voice in my head, and I immediately started trembling as if it was instinct.

- I want to say something to you, not as your father, but as your creator.

“Y-Yes, Father.”

“Yes…”

- I love you guys.

“Thank you,” I said.

“T-T-Thank you,” Sera said.

- I brought you to this land because I love all of you. I wanted all of you to experience many things, and I wanted to give you things that you couldn’t obtain in your past life. I sacrificed many things to create all of you… for your sake.

- I sacrificed many things so that all of you guys could be loved, and I took on a ton of responsibilities to do so. I’m not trying to place a burden on your shoulders, my children. I just want to express how much I love all of you…

“*Ah… ahh…* We would never doubt your love, Father,” I said.

“F-Father… Father…” Sera stuttered.

Sera and I started crying. It was just a misunderstanding. Father, he…

- However, I can’t love just you guys. I don’t think love has priorities, but I hope you understand that I have no choice but to love your mothers even more. They helped me become who I am today. That’s right, Thronus. It’s the same for your master. I sincerely love them.

“…”

“…”

- That’s why I have no choice but to worry. The reason I handed you over to your mothers was that I wanted you to receive their love. However, I also wanted you guys to become the reason for your mother’s joy.

- Of course, some of them do seem happy because of you… but there are those who aren’t. I don’t want you guys to make your mothers unhappy. Seraphim, I’m sorry, but you may not have a choice. I may have to give up on—

“Please forgive him, Father. I-I beg you. Forgive Seraphim. I’ll receive his punishment,

so please…" I begged.

"*Ah… ah, ah…*"

- Your love for your siblings always breaks my heart, Cherubim.

"N-No… *Heuk*… Father… please reconsider. I beg you, please!" I shouted.

- You always sacrificed for your siblings.

"I'll carry his sins. I'll carry Sera's sins," I said.

- I don't want to see Cha Hee-Ra sad. The sin you have to bear isn't Sera's sin.

'N-No.'

I was confused. Many thoughts popped into my head, but I couldn't find an answer to this dilemma.

'What should I do, Mother? If Father really abandons Sera, what should I do, Mother? I… '

"Do whatever you want, Bluey."

Seraphim, Dominions, Thronus, and me…

'Live however you want. Do whatever you want and live the life you want to live. It sounds cheesy and childish, but that is the definition of happiness. Living a childish life is what makes living fun.

"Close your eyes quietly and listen to the voice echoing in your head. Then, you'll find the answer, Bluey. You can become the person you want to be, and you can do everything you want to do.'

Seraphim, Dominions, Thronus, and me…

'At least, that's how I'm living my life, you cutey Bluey. We're the same. Even if you don't want to do that, you will inevitably do it.'

Seraphim, Dominions, Thronus, and me…

'Right?'

"Run, Seraphim…" I mumbled.

"W-What?" Sera questioned.

"Run away from here," I told him.

"*Uh…"*

"Hurry!" I shouted.

- Making such a foolish choice…

"Please forgive me, Father," I said.

And that was when I saw Thronus pointing his sword at my neck…

"Don't move, Cheru. You too, Sera," Thro warned.

"Thronus?" I asked.

"…"

"…"

"You were going to disobey Father just now, right?" Thro asked.

"…"

"Answer me, traitor," Thro urged.

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1. Cherubim's POV ☜

CHAPTER 905
SERA (5)

They looked like they were at their breaking point, and I was sure anyone watching this scene would feel like crying.

The fact that the brothers were pointing their swords at each other wasn't a good look.

Thronus surprised me[1] the most. Thronus was extremely indecisive back then, so I couldn't help but smile at satisfaction upon realizing that he had already made up his mind.

'Thronus has become very loyal after I cut him off once.'

I really liked his attitude. Cutting him off was truly effective. *Ah*, he actually went through that twice. I had to do it again, or he wouldn't have learned his lesson.

- I warned you not to move, Cheru. Don't make me hurt you. I don't want to do this either…

- Thro, Sera is…

- Father will decide everything. Whatever his decision is, we must follow him. I'll talk to him as well about Sera's position… but your behavior right now is basically betrayal toward Father. If you're really going against him, then I will not forgive you. Can you even imagine how heartbroken Father will feel?

- Thro…

- Do you know how Father was feeling when he said that? You're not the only one who's in pain, Cheru.

'We should go stargazing someday. I'll be sure to give you my love.'

- You haven't forgotten how much Father struggled to get us to where we are today,

right? Cheru, we were born thanks to his grace. Are you planning on betraying his hopes?

- But… I can't abandon Sera. If Father… abandons Sera…

- Let's talk to Father together with Domi. Domi, take Sera away.

- *Ah…* okay.

Dominion quietly grabbed Sera.

And that was when Cherubim turned around…

- You!

Thronus exclaimed in surprise, as Cherubim was no longer within Thronus' attack range. I actually expected that to happen because Thronus wouldn't actually hurt Cherubim. He kind of lacked combat power… and more importantly, Cherubim knew that his threats were just empty words.

Thronus rushed toward Dominions and lashed out with his leg. He took advantage of the few seconds when Dominions was hesitating, and his foot reached her abdomen.

Dominions was sent flying away, but she started running away with Seraphim.

- *Ah!*

- Damn it!

"You don't need to go after them, Thro," I told him.

- I'm… sorry.

"You don't need to apologize. I'm really happy knowing that you didn't betray my trust. I'll give you a gift, my lovely child," I said.

- T-Thank you, Father.

They were having mixed emotions. They felt guilty for pointing their swords at each other and disappointed for not following their father's will. It was like Thronus felt

kind of relieved that Seraphim was no longer in danger but was also confused by the strange sense of joy upon knowing that I would reward them despite what happened.

Thronus probably felt that it was a bit immoral, but he was smiling unknowingly.

- *Um…* Father, about Cheru and Sera…

"I'll think about what to do with them, but…" I trailed off.

- May I speak freely?

"Go ahead, Domi," I replied.

- I-I think Cheru is just confused. Mother always tells me every time I make a mistake that… children are bound to make mistakes. She said children learn and grow through mistakes, and they should keep making mistakes.

- I think it's the same for Sera. H-He's not as competent as us right now, but as time goes by, I'm sure you'll start loving—

"So you're trying to teach me a lesson," I interrupted.

- I'm sorry, Father. That's not what I was trying to do…

"No, I'm not blaming you. Humans learn through mistakes. Lee Ji-Hye and I learned a lot through our mistakes. That makes a lot of sense, so I'll reconsider. As you said, I hope Cheru and Sera will learn many things from this incident," I said.

- Thank you.

"Help Rafael upon your return," I ordered.

- Okay…

We hadn't come here to quarrel as a family. It was funny, but we came here to deal with the Mole Saint or whatever was her name. I focused my attention on Cherubim and Seraphim. It was funny seeing them running away desperately despite knowing that I had the Telescope.

Their tear-stricken faces caught my attention.

I was sure they were nervous and scared by the fact that they had betrayed their parents' wishes. I was sure they were thinking that they would probably never receive any love from now on, and it was a painful thought that was eating away at them.

If I were to exaggerate it a bit, they'd probably have a mental breakdown soon, as they had basically ruined their life.

- A-Are you okay… Cheru?

- Yeah… I'm fine, Sera.

- *Heuk… Kgh…*

- Don't cry. I'm here, and I have you.

- Father… *Heck…* Mom… *Heck…*

- Don't cry, Sera… Don't… *Kgh…*

- Mom… Mooom…!

Seraphim, who was crying in Cherubim's arms, clenched his fists.

While I was tapping my thigh quietly, I heard Han Sora's voice next to me.

"Sub Guild Master."

"…"

"Sir?"

"Yes, Miss Sora," I answered.

"Y-You're not… seriously thinking about getting rid of Sera, are you? You're just… trying to scare him, right?" Han Sora asked.

"…"

“You’re just giving him a warning… right?” Han Sora asked.

“…”

“Please…” she begged.

“I’m not sure,” I answered.

“Please don’t do it. Please… *Heuk…*” Han Sora cried.

‘She’s making it seem like I’m the only bad guy here. Actually, she’s right, but… it doesn’t feel good.’

“I’m not going to kill him,” I told her.

“It sounds the same to me,” Han Sora argued.

“You’re the Angel of Magic, Miss Sora. You should know this by now… and I haven’t made a decision yet. Actually, it’s more like I’m trying not to make a decision. I’m going to let Ha-Yan decide,” I said.

“…”

‘Honestly, I feel kind of uncomfortable making the decision.’

To be honest, I was fine with discarding him. We had a bad relationship, after all, and even though we lacked manpower, it wasn’t so bad that we had to rely on Seraphim.

It was true that it was disappointing… but discarding him was probably the better move, as he didn’t really matter. I was more worried about Ha-Yan than Seraphim. If I were to truly get rid of Seraphim…

‘I don’t think Ha-Yan will like it.’

Han Sora wouldn’t like it, and it was highly likely that Jung Ha-Yan wouldn’t like it as well. Since she had already decided to make Seraphim one of her people, she wouldn’t be able to push him away so easily. Jung Ha-Yan’s relationships were generally like that. Entering her world was difficult, but exiting her world was even more difficult.

“Then, what you did just now…” Han Sora questioned.

“Well… apart from what just happened, he still needs to be punished. This isn’t enough, and I am not satisfied yet. However, I’m worried about Ha-Yan. I can’t stop thinking about her smile…” I answered.

“S-So you do care about her,” Han Sora commented.

“What do you take me for?” I questioned.

“I-It’s nothing, sir. Forget it. Also, from now on—”

“Regarding the kids who ran away from home, leave them alone for now. They need to realize that they’ll only end up suffering by running away from home. I plan on asking Ha-Yan indirectly,” I interrupted her.

“What?”

“You said you think he’s receiving her love because he’s competent. I need to fix that mindset of hers. If I do that, don’t you think she’ll get an answer? Honestly, I think it’s too late,” I replied.

“How are you going to do that?” Han Sora asked.

“Talking to her sincerely is probably the best way to go about it,” I responded.

“I’m sure she’ll like that as well,” Han Sora commented.

“If she can’t understand it, then I’m going to try taking it away from her,” I told her.

“T-Take what?” she asked.

“Her magic,” I replied.

Han Sora looked at me as if I were crazy, and it was a reasonable reaction. Taking magic away from the God of Magic was basically absurd. Of course, I knew it was impossible.

‘Yeah, it’s actually impossible.’

It would be impossible if I were to use the system, but it was a different story using my own abilities. I just had to concoct a potion that would restrict her mana for a short period of time.

It was going to be difficult, but it was possible if I used Jung Ha-Yan's blood as the catalyst for that potion.

After all, her blood was the essence of all magic itself.

I could easily obtain her blood, and I knew how to concoct that kind of potion, so it wouldn't be that difficult for me to make one that was powerful enough to restrict Jung Ha-Yan. Of course, I needed the right ingredients.

The problem was its effectiveness.

Even if I used every single legendary catalyst out there, I wasn't sure whether the potion's effectiveness would last even a day.

It was kind of a strange method, but it was achievable with enough sincerity to my beloved. Moreover, Jung Ha-Yan was really quick-witted when it came to matters affecting her. Unfortunately, there wasn't anyone I could consult with—wait, there was actually someone I could talk about it with.

'Perhaps I should ask him.'

[Excuse me, Commander.]

[Go away, Lee Ki-Young.]

[Do you have a family?]

[Go away.]

[Do you have someone you love?]

[Go away.]

[What do you think love is?]

[Crazy bastard.]

[Do you have children back on Earth?]

[Go away.]

I really had to take care of him once I had the opportunity to do so.

“Anyway, that was my plan,” I said.

“…”

“I’m saying this just in case, but don’t send Seraphim any support. I’m kind of narrow-minded, so I want to see him suffer. The same goes for Cherubim… Actually, let’s not do that to him,” I said.

“You’re… compromising?” Han Sora asked, sounding dumbfounded.

“I compromise from time to time when it comes to the people I care about,” I told her.

Especially if it was Ha-Yan…

I could still see her crying through the Telescope.

[Sorry to ask this all of a sudden, but can you give me your blood?]

[Go away, Lee Ki-Young.]

[Wrong send.]

‘This bastard. Did he make a macro to reply to me automatically?’

I sent a similar message to Jung Ha-Yan again.

Jung Ha-Yan’s face brightened up instantly, and she instantly sprang up from her bed.

I had no idea that she’d like that.

[Why? Why do you need it?]

[I suddenly want to store your blood.]

She giggled and wiped away her tears with one hand. The sight told me that she liked my request. She was crying her heart out not too long ago, but now, she was smiling, so she had to be feeling better now.

'I'm glad that she likes it… '

Jung Ha-Yan's face was flushed as she nodded continuously, and I was convinced that I had made the right choice. I decided not to watch what was about to happen, but I received blood packaged in a very pretty bottle.

After breakfast the next day, or more specifically, eleven hours later, Jung Ha-Yan lost her magic.

I went all out. I used Mythic-rank catalysts, Belial's Curse, and Jung Ha-Yan's blood as ingredients for the potion. The Alchemist of Light job effect was even activated, but the potion I concocted would only last three days.

Fortunately, Jung Ha-Yan immediately started hiding the fact that she had lost her magic.

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1. Lee Ki-Young's POV ☜

CHAPTER 906
SERA (6)

It was natural for Jung Ha-Yan to hide her condition. I thought she would come to me for advice, but nothing really changed. Perhaps it was because she was still used to the old ways.

It seemed like she was still convinced that she had to be competent to receive any love.

She also thought that since she was the one who had made a big mistake, she couldn't blame other people for it. I decided to think about this as her paying the price for growing stronger in an unusual way.

'Thinking of it like that actually makes me feel a lot better.'

I turned while sipping my tea and saw Jung Ha-Yan looking around anxiously.

She didn't seem all that different from her usual self, but I could tell that she was feeling dispirited. She was trying to act normal, but it was so unnatural that she looked strange.

She kept glancing over at the tent, and her facial expression was telling me that she wanted to go in. I was sure she needed time to figure out what was going on, and I was sure she could feel her mana evaporating even while sipping on her tea.

It was like Jung Ha-Yan to act like nothing was wrong despite the abnormality. I was sure she didn't want others to find out that there was something wrong with her. Many different thoughts were popping up in her head because it happened so suddenly, but the first thing she thought of was to make sure that no one would notice it.

'It could've been really bad.'

Of course, nothing bad would actually happen, but I felt kind of uncomfortable as I made many different assumptions. If we were actually in the middle of an expedition

or if we ended up entering a dungeon while her magic was sealed…

I had Mind's Eye, so I could check her condition, but her status was a wall of text that strained my eyes. If I weren't a member of the expedition, the problem would be even more serious. The party could get annihilated, or the worst-case scenario could happen.

If we were in the middle of a war, we wouldn't make it this far.

I thought things were going pretty well, but it didn't seem to be the case. There were things that made me worried, and I was still worried about them right now.

Jung Ha-Yan's expression was changing continuously.

"Ha-Yan, are you okay?" I asked.

"*Huh?* W-W-What… do you mean? I-I'm fine…" Jung Ha-Yan answered.

'She's answering with an excuse.'

"Well, you don't look so good… is it because of Sera?" I asked.

"N-No, it's nothing like that. *Ah!* Come to think of it, is Sera… d-doing okay?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

'So she does care about him.'

"He's working with the party members, so don't worry so much," I replied.

"I-I'm glad," she said.

"If there's something you want to say, you can tell me anytime," I told her.

"Okay… b-but there's nothing… I want to say right now," Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

"Really?" I questioned.

"Yes, r-really. I-I'm the same as always. O-O-Oppa… I'm kind of… tired right now…" Jung Ha-Yan said.

“Oh yeah? *Ah*, I want to visit the Democratic Country real quick. Can you open up a warp gate…” I asked.

“I-I’m sorry… but I can’t. I’m… really tired right now… I-I think I should head in first,” Jung Ha-Yan refused.

“Okay, go ahead,” I said.

“Are you heading in already, Miss Jung Ha-Yan?” Han Sora asked.

“Y-Yeah,” Jung Ha-Yan answered.

“Is there anything you need?” Han Sora asked.

“N-No… don’t come in, Sora. I-I want to be alone… for now,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

Jung Ha-Yan looked nervous.

“What?”

“I-I don’t want you coming in either… Sora…” Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

“*Ah…*”

Han Sora looked shocked and nervous as well, but I was sure there was a different reason behind her shock

‘She had definitely never imagined that this would happen.’

Han Sora had probably never imagined that Jung Ha-Yan would hide things from her. She thought Jung Ha-Yan would always rely on her to deal with hardships, but…

‘She must be thinking that she’s mistaken… ‘

At one point, Han Sora desperately wanted to leave the party… but right now, she was too sad to leave. Human emotions were truly funny.

“I-I’m really sorry… I-I’m going to go rest, oppa. I’m sorry… Sora,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“You don’t need to apologize. I can ride my griffon to the Democratic Country. Your

health takes precedence over everything. Take care of yourself, Ha-Yan," I said.

"Miss… Jung… Ha-Yan…" Han Sora muttered.

Just like that, Jung Ha-Yan entered her tent.

"At one point, you asked me to transfer you elsewhere," I reminded Han Sora.

"W-When did I say that?" Han Sora stuttered.

"Did you not expect Ha-Yan to start hiding things from you?" I asked.

"I…"

"I think you drew that conclusion because she has low self-esteem. Isn't it normal for humans to live while not knowing when they'll be abandoned?" I questioned.

I had similar thoughts as well when I first met Kim Hyun-Sung.

It seemed that Ha-Yan and I had more similarities than I thought.

"It's not that… It's just… she doesn't need to feel like she needs to hide things from me…" Han Sora said.

"That's what you want, Miss Sora. Ha-Yan doesn't think the same way. Since you learned many things from her, she probably cares more about you than me. *Ah*, let me send a message," I told her.

[Check it for me.]

[Are you doing your job properly?]

[Don't even think about nitpicking ridiculous things, Lee Ki-Young.]

[I checked to see if Commander Jin had done this part, oppa. It's not bad.]

[Check thoroughly again, Noona.]

[Bastard. I told you not to be nitpicky. I already assumed that you would do that.]

[By the way, Dominions contacted me. What are you doing over there?]

[Just trivial errands related to Seraphim. There's also an issue with Ha-Yan. *Ah*, I'm currently trying to lure the Mole Saint out. There are a lot more things to handle than I thought. Anyway, it's going to be hard for me to focus on that place for the time being, so take care of things for me. Commander, please make sure to do your job properly.]

[Everything happened all at once… Still, I'm glad we have Commander Jin here. Don't you agree, Oppa? We can focus on the other parts, all thanks to him. You should reward him someday.]

[Of course, but has he done something amazing that deserves a reward? All he did was take care of some chores. It's not good to promote a rookie who just started working.]

[Say that after you've checked my work.]

[Talk to me after you've done something that is worthy of a reward, Commander. You're like a rookie giving advice to an expert.]

[Damn it, Lee Ki-Young. You're getting on my nerves. If I—]

[Mr. Lee Ki-Young has left the chatroom.]

[Miss Lee Ji-Hye invited Mr. Lee Ki-Young to the chatroom.]

[Take good care of our Domi, my love.]

[Don't worry, my other half.]

[Damn it. You're making me sick.]

[Mr. Jin Cheong has left the chatroom.]

Ah, I should contact Hee-Ra noona as well…

[Noonaa♥]

[What's wrong, darling?]

[It's kind of hard to explain, but if Cherubim contacts you, I want you to ignore him.]

[All right.]

[Just like that?]

[I thought we needed to do something like this at least once. He needs to learn how to live alone. What is he doing right now?]

[He's crying.]

[Really? Make him cry more, and you should stop by the guild. I have things I need to discuss with you.]

'We're raising him to become independent.'

Cherubim entered a cave with Seraphim, and he started comforting the latter.

I immediately stopped looking at them because they weren't important right now.

"You know what's important right now, right? This isn't the time to be sending messages…" Han Sora's voice echoed in my ears.

"Yeah, yeah," I said.

"What is Miss Jung Ha-Yan doing? Are you sure she's okay?" Han Sora asked

"Hold on. I'm worried about her as well. I just needed time to organize things since there are many things I need to handle. I'll check out Rafael, Thro, and Domi later. Also, we have eyes in the tent. Turn it on. Ha-Yan doesn't have access to her mana right now, so she can't sense those eyes," I told her.

"*Oh!* Right…"

Han Sora grabbed the mirror, and I looked at it with her.

Honestly, I knew how Jung Ha-Yan was feeling without even looking at her. She was probably really anxious and was feeling the same way when she was still in the tutorial dungeon. Just as I expected, she was pacing around the tenth.

- W-What should I do? W-What… W-Why is this happening? Why…

She was evaluating her condition while talking to herself.

She raised her hands and channeled a spell quietly to no avail. There was no way she could resist the effects written on the potion that the system itself had declared. Jung Ha-Yan was currently suffering the effects of that potion.

- W-What should I do… *Hiccup*… W-What do I do…

Jung Ha-Yan was shaking, and tears would fall down her eyes every time she blinked. Her bad habits were also coming back, even though I thought that she had long abandoned those habits. She started biting her nails and scratching her head.

She was too nervous in my eyes.

- No… Please… please… *Heuk*… Please… *Hiccup…*

'I don't really want to keep watching this.'

I was sure Han Sora felt the same way.

"*Ah…* Miss Jung Ha-Yan… what do we do? I feel bad… I feel bad for Miss Jung Ha-Yan," Han Sora said.

"We're doing this to fix her," I told her.

"…"

"Still… this is worse than I imagined," Han Sora said.

- *Heuk…* I-It's over. It's… all over. What should I do… *Heuk…* Move…

"…"

- Y-You stupid! Move! Why aren't you listening to me?!

In the end, Han Sora ran out.

- Miss Jung Ha-Yan…

- *Huh? Uh...* H-Hold on… Wait…

- Miss Jung Ha-Yan, I…

- Don’t come in… D-Don’t come in!

- I heard you crying…

- I-It’s nothing.

- Are you sure you’re okay?

- I said… it’s nothing.

- Are you really… really… okay?

-…

-…

- Y-Yeah…

- You don’t have to hide it from me.

-…

- You said you would tell me everything, right?

I thought Han Sora was being a little too hasty, but I didn’t think that it was a bad idea overall, as it seemed like Jung Ha-Yan felt like she was in a corner. She needed someone to rely on to make it easier for her to speak her mind.

‘The problem is… ‘

I had no idea whether she was going to open up or not.

- You said you’d tell me everything, including the bad and the good. You promised me… didn’t you?

I saw Jung Ha-Yan wriggling her fingers in hesitation.

CHAPTER 907
SERA (7)

- You said… you would share everything. That's what you promised.

-…

Jung Ha-Yan was in a dilemma. She was having an internal struggle about confessing the truth to Han Sora. Jung Ha-Yan was breathing heavily, but her face gradually became serious. She was probably thinking how she had turned out like this when she was completely useless back on Earth.

I didn't think that I was solely responsible for the values that made her who she was today, but…

'It's her family's fault for abandoning the cute Ha-Yan. They're heartless bastards, damn it.'

I had probably made her condition worse, but her mindset that she'd be abandoned if she wasn't competent was still deep inside of her.

According to what she told me, she had always been alone. She had trouble communicating, and she wasn't particularly outstanding in other fields, so she probably felt like she was a burden to her family.

Her oldest sister started working at a young age, and her second oldest sister was smart. She hadn't said it herself, but she definitely didn't have any friends when she was in school. I actually heard from her that she was made an outcast…

'This part is different for Yul-Ha and me.'

Basically, Jung Ha-Yan found value in her existence upon arriving on the continent. She found something she was good at, and it was making people happy with her as well.

The grandpas and grandmas at the Magic Tower liked her a lot, and they all had their

attention on her. She wasn't the type who would care about other people, but magic was a gift and blessing that made Jung Ha-Yan who she was today.

In some ways, she was probably glad that she was transported here.

"Maybe I should've asked her for more details about her life on Earth," I said.

It couldn't be helped. She didn't seem like she wanted to talk about it, but it would be best to hear her story even if I had to pressure her a bit for it.

Jung Ha-Yan didn't say anything and simply walked in front of the door.

Han Sora was standing just a few inches away from her.

As time ticked by, Jung Ha-Yan was starting to become exhausted. She grabbed the door, but she lost confidence and let it go.

- *Heuk… Hiccup…*

All I could hear in her room was her sobs.

- I will never leave you, Miss Jung Ha-Yan.

-…

- You even said you wanted to stay together.

- Yeah…

- Please… open the door.

It was like they were filming a teen drama…

'You know, the one where the heartbroken protagonist always gets comforted. No, it's like that show Animal Farm[1] where the process of heartbroken puppies opening up to humans is shown.'

Even though Han Sora could just walk into the tent, she still decided to ask Jung Ha-Yan to open the door. I was sure it was somewhat symbolic, but I could see that she wanted Jung Ha-Yan to open up to her.

It seemed that Han Sora's sincerity was working because Jung Ha-Yan nodded quietly and opened the door of the tent that was too grand to be called a tent.

Jung Ha-Yan greeted Han Sora and stared quietly at her.

Han Sora seemed to have realized that this was Jung Ha-Yan's way of opening up.

A slight smile tugged at Han Sora's worried face.

- S-Sora… I…

- Yes, Miss Jung Ha-Yan.

'You don't need to say anything. Just hug.'

Hugging was the first thing they had to do. Han Sora started crying as well upon seeing Jung Ha-Yan's messy face. If I showed this to Han Sora in the past, who always ran away, she wouldn't believe me.

- W-Why did you bite your nails again?

- *Ah…* well…

- Your pretty hair is a mess as well. You should stop pulling your hair. Didn't you say that you'll stop doing that?

- O-Okay.

- Why did you cry so much? Your eyes are swollen. *Heuk*… why are you so sad?

'Damn. She's doing so well.'

Han Sora knew what was going on, but she was acting really well.

'You're involved in this as well, so why are you feigning ignorance? You're an accomplice, too.'

I felt bad because it felt like I was ruining the mood, but Han Sora was…

- Why are you acting like such a fool? Miss Jung Ha-Yan… you're really…

I really liked the tension.

- Why are you always suffering alone…

- I-I'm sorry… Sora.

- You should apologize to yourself, not to me.

It was dramatic, but the situation wasn't bad.

I thought it was pretty good because it was actually helping Jung Ha-Yan calm down. Earlier, she was hyperventilating, but her breathing had evened out, and she no longer seemed nervous. She was relaxed and could finally reflect on herself again.

- So… what happened?

The timing at which Han Sora asked the question wasn't bad either. I thought she would talk to her while crying, but Han Sora was pretty calm.

- I-It's nothing serious…

- I still want to hear it.

- M-M-My magic… suddenly disappeared…

With that, Jung Ha-Yan stared at Han Sora's face. She was clearly curious about her reaction.

- I-I think it's just t-t-temporary…

Jung Ha-Yan was nervous, so she was saying that it was fine and that her magic would soon return. She was also hinting at Han Sora that she didn't want the latter to leave her alone.

- I-I'm just trying to find out why this is happening, and it's just temporary, so it should be fine, right?

- Why are you asking me?

- I-I-I don't know…

- Are you okay, Miss Jung Ha-Yan?

- Y-Yeah… i-it's only temporary. Y-You can stay as the Angel of Magic, so…

- That's not important, Miss Jung Ha-Yan. I don't care if you have magic or not. You're the one important to me, not your magic. I'm sure the sub guild master also…

- D-D-Don't tell him… He mustn't know.

- I'm sure he'll tell you that it's fine.

- D-Don't tell him! Don't…!

- You have a lot of strengths even without magic.

-…

- You're nice… pretty and cute. Magic isn't what brought you to existence. I'm sure he likes you because of those many sides of you. Look at this. Don't you think you look lovely as well?

Han Sora conversed with Jung Ha-Yan while fixing the latter's messy hair.

Jung Ha-Yan relied a lot on Han Sora, so she looked at the mirror quietly.

- Y-You're prettier, Sora.

- Really? Which part?

- Your eyes. Your odd eyes.

You gave her those odd eyes, Ha-Yan.

- I-I…

- No, you're really pretty, Miss Jung Ha-Yan. Also, your appearance doesn't really matter. The sub guild master said that he liked you as a person. The two of you were together the moment you landed on the continent.

- You experienced many things together, grew together, promised to have a future

together, and dedicated yourself to each other. You can be a little more confident about yourself, you know?

- S-Still… I-I don't want to… *Hiccup*… I-I really don't want to tell him. I… really… really don't want to… please…

- Then how about we tell him later?

-…

-…

- L-Let's do that…

Han Sora was really skilled at handling Jung Ha-Yan.

It seemed that she had long gotten used to handling Jung Ha-Yan, as she had been spending the majority of her time with her. Obviously, the time that she had spent with Sera was helpful as well.

Whenever Jung Ha-Yan was calm, Han Sora would tell the former what she wanted her to do, and if Jung Ha-Yan didn't want to do something, Han Sora would find a middle ground that they could settle for.

It sounded easy, but it wasn't easy at all.

We were talking about Jung Ha-Yan here, after all.

Their conversation was going so smoothly that Jung Ha-Yan looked a bit convinced.

- You said it's going to come back soon anyway. Let's wait and see what happens. Also, you should think carefully about what you're going to do next. We don't need to be hasty. Are you… feeling better?

- Y-Yeah. Thanks, Sora. T-Then what should I say to oppa?

- I'll try talking to him. If we end up in a situation where you'd have to use spells, I can cast spells in your place… I don't think we'll be needing it anytime soon though.

- I… need to do that thing… The thing I do with oppa…

- You mean managing the continent? I'll talk to him about that as well, Miss Jung Ha-Yan. So don't worry too much about it, okay? You're the God of Magic. You've been experiencing hardships lately and have been really tired these days.

- I think it's because you're really stressed. Even if I tell you to relax, I know you won't relax, but I think it's best if you rest and stop thinking about anything. No, you have to do that.

- Y-You're right, Sora… I-I've been having a headache recently, and I've been feeling frustrated, too. I-It's because of Sera… I-Is Sera doing okay?

- Yes, Sera is doing fine since I've been taking care of him. Just think about yourself, Miss Jung Ha-Yan. You have to… so that I can act like my normal self. I'll help you.

- Are you sure… that's okay?

- Yes, of course.

- *Heuk… Hiccup…* Really?

- Yes.

- You won't leave me, right?

- Why would I? I'll stay with you even after you get married.

- Really… are you really not going to leave me?

- Yes, I won't.

Han Sora definitely had a trauma about that.

- I-It'll come back soon.

- Yeah, it'll come back soon, right?

- But y-you still might leave me.

- I told you that I won't leave you. Geez, Miss Jung Ha-Yan…

- S-Since we made a promise, l-let's make it official. L-Let's sign a contract.

- What?

- A magic contract. If you leave me… you'll go… *boom!*

'Shit. Good thing I didn't go in there first.'

'Thanks, Sora… '

- What? I-Is that really necessary…

- We'll bind our promise using the magic contract. T-That'll help me feel reassured. Since I can't do it, y-you can do it for me, right?

- *Ah…*

- Y-You'll do that for me, right? You can… right?

Han Sora nodded without realizing it.

At the same time…

"Sir."

"*Oh*… Hye-Jin… what brings you here?" I asked.

'She's a friend I haven't seen in a while.'

"A strange monster appeared in the capital," Jo Hye-Jin answered.

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1. A South Korean television program that focuses on animals and their relationship with humans. ☜

CHAPTER 908
SERA (8)

"What the hell are you talking about? You just appeared out of nowhere…" I questioned.

"You'll understand once you've seen the report about the situation, sir," Jo Hye-Jin said.

"What happened? If you came all the way here just to tell me—"

"We're still investigating the exact time it happened, but we believe it happened at around nine-eleven in the morning. The monster's first appearance is believed to be within one kilometer of the capital's clock tower.

"The monster's sudden appearance completely disrupted the areal; there were many casualties and injured victims," Jo Hye-Jin said, interrupting me.

"You don't have to report in such a formal manner. Just go straight to the point, Miss Hye-Jin. You're saying that a monster has appeared within the capital, and there was a lot of damage, right?" I asked.

"Yes. It was a good thing that Mr. Park Deok-Gu, Mr. Ahn Ki-Mo, and Miss Kim Ye-Ri were nearby, so the damage was minimized, albeit it's still a lot of damage," Jo Hye-Jin replied.

'Why were they there?'

Jo Hye-Jin stared at my face, seemingly trying to deduce my reaction.

"Mr. Park Deok-Gu has decided to host a capital exploration."

'A capital exploration? Why are they exploring the capital all of a sudden? I think he just needed an excuse to play around.'

"He said they were having drinks at a bar near the clock tower," Jo Hye-Jin informed.

“Who drinks in the morning?” I questioned.

“They’ve been drinking since last night…” Jo Hye-Jin added.

“You mean he took care of the monster while drunk? That pig…” I said.

What if he had ended up getting hurt?

“How is he?” I asked.

“He suffered a serious injury, but I was told that he had recovered to the point that he can go about his daily activities without any issues,” Jo Hye-Jin answered.

“He sure recovers quickly,” I mumbled. It was ridiculous that he drank all night while exploring the capital, but I was surprised by the fact that he fought a monster despite being drunk. I had a feeling I knew why he didn’t report this to me himself.

He was probably scared that I would scold him, or he thought it wasn’t a serious problem.

I wasn’t sure why a monster appeared in the middle of the capital, but those three were considered the top adventures of the continent, so I was more surprised that Park Deok-Gu suffered a serious injury.

‘Maybe its level was higher than they thought.’

It was impossible for weak monsters to leave even a scratch on Park Deok-Gu.

His Endurance had gone beyond the limits, and he had a ton of buffs from his equipment as well as from his job himself.

I was dumbfounded because all of this happened while I was watching Jung Ha-Yan and Han Sora. Fortunately, Jo Hye-Jin hadn’t mentioned anything about Kim Ye-Ri and Ahn Ki-Mo’s injuries, which meant that they had carried out their role properly amidst the chaos.

“It’ll be faster if you see for yourself rather than me explaining it,” Jo Hye-Jin suggested.

“Well, I’m sure someone has recorded what happened, and some of them must’ve

died while in the middle of recording it," I said.

I knocked on the table, and a Goddess' Mirror popped up. I immediately went to the Videos tab and saw keywords such as "Blue Guild Members vs. Monster" in the rankings.

I clicked on a video, and it immediately started playing.

- What the hell is happening?!

- Seriously. A monster…

- Yes, there seems to be a monster. I think we drank too much.

The three obviously looked drunk.

'Wait, why is Kim Ye-Ri so drunk? Is she even old enough to drink?'

- I think the three of us are hallucinating at the same time. Wait, maybe I'm dreaming, and the two of you are here in my dreamland?

- We need to. Take care of the monster. First.

- I'll cast a holy power spell. Let's take this seriously.

Ahn Ki-Mo said that he was going to take the situation seriously, but I couldn't believe him at all because he was stumbling.

The guards of the capital cordoned off the area.

Meanwhile, Park Deok-Gu shouted and charged at the monster.

The camera captured the monster's entire body.

It had a huge frame, a grotesque-looking face, and a bizarre form.

I had no idea what to call that monster, but it was different from the monsters I had ever seen so far. It had a pair of white wings on its back, and it definitely was a strange monster from the way it was making a *buzzing* sound.

- This is! Physical magic!

- Then, should I play the role of a berserker who's crazy for blood?

- Dance of Enchantment.

'Stop it guys. I can't go anywhere because you guys are embarrassing me.'

- *Woooooo!*

- I-It's not an easy opponent…

- We should focus more.

- Dance of Enchantment Second Style: Coming-of-Age Ritual.

'Ye-Ri, are you crazy?'

- H-Hold on… It's stronger than we think. Wait! *Eek!* It hurts!

- Dance of Enchantment Third Style: Rosy Wind.

- *Eek!*

"Take this video down as soon as I'm done watching it and tell those three to submit a letter of explanation—no, a ten-page letter of apology," I ordered.

"This video is already viral, though…" Jo Hye-Jin said.

- Dance of Enchantment. Truth. Master. My name is Kim Ye-Ri, and no words can describe me. Awaken—succubus Mode.

"All right, fine. Just leave it alone so that it stays in the Benigoa Net forever. They have to see what they were doing while they were drunk," I said.

- *Kgh!* Physical Martial Arts—Indestructible!

- Bloodthirster: Berserk!

- *Ahhhhh!* Physical Martial Arts—Heavenly Subjugation!

“Actually, I’m going to punish them. Let’s give them the highest level of punishment that the guild can impose in my name. Reduce their pay and tell them to return their equipment for two months. The fine will be… ten thousand gold,” I said.

“That’s a good idea, sir,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

The pig was finally sent flying after holding out for so long.

Was that when he got hurt? I saw Park Deok-Gu slamming into a wall, but I was relieved to see him standing up almost immediately. Of course, he probably broke a bone or two upon impact.

They were shouting at the monster with uneasy looks, but it seemed like they hadn’t forgotten their roles.

Park Deok-Gu, the vanguard, was fighting the monster face-to-face, while Kim Ye-Ri was taking advantage of Park Deok-Gu’s peeling to deal damage to the monster. Ahn Ki-Mo stood at the rear, supporting Park Deok-Gu.

The way he seamlessly cast spells infused with holy power between Kim Ye-Ri and Park Deok-Gu told me that these three siblings had a ton of experience working together.

Kim Ye-Ri was stumbling like a drunken master as she attacked, but it was a perfect performance. She hopped onto the monster’s back and started climbing it up with a dagger in hand. She hopped onto a roof and attached the wire that was attached to her wrist to the clock tower before taking to the sky.

Kim Ye-Ri was soon flying above the city.

‘This is basically a one-man show.’

The guards and adventurers got into a formation and started shooting arrows at the monster. The monster swung its arm like a lunatic, but Park Deok-Gu grabbed its arms, suppressing it. Kim Ye-Ri then hopped onto its arm and hacked away at it.

At this point, the battle was over as long as the monster didn’t recover its health.

“It’s holy power.” I pointed out.

“Yes, it is. The videos after this one were uploaded by other adventurers,” Jo Hye-Jin informed.

“Well, I don’t need to look at those. I’m sure many adventurers participated in the battle. There must have been some damage, but they still managed to take the monster down, right?” I asked.

“Yes, sir. Additionally, they brought its corpse here. I thought you might be curious about it,” Jo Hye-Jin replied.

“That’s great. We actually found something similar to that monster. There’s a non-disclosure agreement, but it doesn’t matter anymore because everyone in the Sacred Democratic Country will eventually know.

“Rafael’s party was hunting a similar monster around here. Its appearance is kind of different, but they seem to be the same type of monster,” I informed her.

“…”

“The Holy Sword Warrior believes that the monster is related to a dungeon… and I agree with him,” I continued.

“It’s definitely… safer to think that this phenomenon is happening because of a dungeon,” Jo Hye-Jin commented.

“Yes.”

“Are you—”

“I’m helping them,” I answered.

I felt a bit relaxed to see Jo Hye-Jin’s face. Her long hair was still tied up, and her armor was still pretty shiny. However, I could still see Bonobono’s color theme, which meant that she couldn’t quite give up her favorite color.

Obviously, she still had the spear that the God of Sacrifice and Revival had bestowed upon her. She could have contacted me in other ways, but she probably thought that it was more comfortable for us to talk face-to-face.

“It’s probably an unranked dungeon, but I assume the true difficulty is probably

Mythic. The monsters are pretty high in level to say that it's simply because of the dungeon. If we don't take care of it, similar monsters will keep on appearing in the near future.

"Where's the corpse of that monster?" I asked.

"It's on its way here, sir," she answered.

"Then let's head over to the place where the monster that the Holy Sword Warrior's party had encountered was defeated. *Ah*, I forgot to ask you this, but I coincidentally saw something on Benigoa Net…" I trailed off.

"What?"

"Something about Jo Hye-Jin of the Blue Guild going on a date with a man…" I continued.

"What do you…"

"You haven't been on Benioga Net recently? Well, it's a pretty old story…" I asked.

"*Ah!*"

"…"

Jo Hye-Jin nodded quietly as if she had figured something out.

"It wasn't a date," Jo Hye-Jin said.

"?"

"We simply ate together. I accidentally hurt his griffon. I was going to compensate him, but he said that I could just buy him some food; he also told me that he was a fan of mine…

"However, it turns out that he was a superficial and rude man, so the entire experience was torture for me. I think his name was… Lee Ji-Hoo? Contrary to his first impression, he was extremely rude. Anyway, it's not what you think, so stay out of it," she explained.

'Why is Lee Ji-Hoo being mentioned all of a sudden?'

It seemed that Jo Hye-Jin truly thought of it as a bad memory, and I could see that from the frown on her face.

"Be careful. There are many strange people in this world. I'm sure there are people who are more than willing to take advantage of our innocent Hye-Jin," I warned her.

"That's what it seemed like. At first, he gave strange compliments—no, let's stop talking about it, sir. Let's go. *Ah!* Also, you need to issue a statement," Jo Hye-Jin said.

"What kind of statement?" I asked.

"A statement about the recent events. Miss Oscar and Father Basel have officially requested one from you. It's a monster that can wield holy power, after all," Jo Hye-Jin explained.

It was understandable. After all, it hadn't been that long since the continent returned to normal. I was sure most denizens were afraid that there was going to be another judgement.

In fact, some of them were probably thinking that they had yet to be forgiven for their sins or that the gods and goddesses of the continent were testing mankind again.

They were probably coming up with all sorts of theories about the apocalypse. I needed to make a statement to reassure them, and I needed to deal with this issue before things became even more chaotic.

I walked into Rafael's camp with Jo Hye-Jin and soon arrived at where the monster's corpse was located. I saw Han Sora and Jung Ha-Yan. It seemed that Han Sora was done speaking with Jung Ha-Yan, but the latter remained uneasy…

"Ha-Yan, are you feeling better?" I asked.

"*Ah*… y-yes. I'm still kind of tired…" Jung Ha-Yan answered.

"You can go in and rest…" I told her.

"I-It's fine. More importantly, M-Miss J-Jo Hye-Jin is here as well," Jung Ha-Yan

greeted.

“Hello, Miss Jung Ha-Yan and Miss Han Sora,” Jo Hye-Jin greeted back.

“It’s been a while since we saw each other,” Han Sora said.

They were assigned their own tasks. There had been no expeditions recently, so they rarely ran into each other. Realizing that, I couldn’t help but think about planning something that would allow everyone to meet in one place again.

“Tell them to transport that corpse from the capital here, Miss Hye-Jin,” I ordered.

“Yes, sir,” Jo Hye-Jin answered.

“And Miss Sora, please call Rafael’s party for me. The situation has changed,” I instructed.

“Okay.”

When I entered the tent, the first thing I saw was Dominions dissecting the corpse.

The way she greeted us while her face was covered in gory stuff was a grotesque sight.

I waved my hand, afraid that she’d walk up to us.

Dominions obediently went back to her work.

‘Where is Thronus? Is he investigating the nearby area?’

And that was when I heard a loud noise…

Boom!

“…”

“…”

“This is the third time,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

Rafael barged into the tent.

“Hyung, are you okay? Y-You should move somewhere safe…” Rafael suggested.

Nothing had happened yet, and it was *really* far away.

Nothing was going to happen here.

‘Wait, isn’t Sera and Cheru in that direction?’

- C-Cheru! Look at that. I-If we take that with us, Father m-might forgive us b-because it’s an achievement.

‘No, I still won’t forgive you.’

-…

‘Don’t you dare agree with him.’

CHAPTER 909
SERA (9)

- You think so?

-…

- You think Father will be happy?

- I-I'm sure he'll be happy. H-He might forgive us. T-T-Thro and Domi said they'll talk to him, too. I'm sure… *Kgh*… M-Mother will be happy, too… S-She might look for me again.

'He does *look desperate.'*

This was a brand-new side of him that I could only see because he had no choice but to do something like this. I was not sure whether this was an appropriate description or not, but he looked similar to an anxious puppy without their owner around.

They *did* go against my wishes, but they knew that they acted out of place, so their reaction was totally reasonable. It had only been a day and a few hours, but the boys already looked exhausted.

They were trying to rely on each other, but there was a limit to that.

I couldn't help but think that they had finally found a place where they could seek refuge. Seraphim was always looking for that kind of place, so it was understandable for him to show that kind of reaction.

However, it was a different story for the epitome of composure, Cherubim. The way he was acting made me think that they were feeling cornered.

Still, Cherubim…

- He won't forgive us.

'Does he really think that he's making a reasonable judgement here?'

- Still, he might reconsider. Right, Sera?

- Yeah. I-If your mother helps, too…

- Mother…

Cherubim started tearing up at the thought of Cha Hee-Ra. In the end, he nodded anxiously. The issue was whether they could even handle the monster or not. I believed that a party of four could handle this monster, so it was impossible with just the two of them. Actually, even a party of four would find it difficult to handle this unprecedented monster.

The two looked at each other as they got ready for the hunt, and the moment they charged, I heard a voice beside me.

'Ah, here he goes again. I'm done talking.'

"Hyung…" Rafael said.

"…"

"Hyung, are you really… going with us?" Rafael asked.

"*Haha*… you don't have to worry too much about me, Mr. Rafael," I told him.

"Of course, I'll do my best so you don't get hurt… but still… I'm worried… that I might make a mistake…" Rafael said.

"I used to be an adventurer, too, you know? I cleared a lot of dungeons and camped out in forests many times. At the very least, I won't get in the way," I said.

"E-Even if you tell me that…" Rafael stuttered.

'What the hell?'

"I'm sorry, hyung. I didn't mean to say that… I wasn't trying to insult you…" Rafael apologized.

“It’s fine. I completely understand how you feel, Mr. Rafael. However, I’d like to see it for myself,” I said.

“Then, promise me that you’ll follow my orders until the end of the expedition,” Rafael requested.

Hearing that, I became convinced that he had truly grown a lot. He had always been a passive individual, but he had finally become confident enough to make that kind of request.

“Okay, I’ll do that since your party is in charge of this. *Ah*, I don’t know if you heard, but a similar monster has appeared in the capital. I think rumors about this dungeon have been spreading among the adventurers in the Democratic Country…” I informed him.

“Yes, I’m aware, hyung,” Rafael said.

“If you’d like, I can ask for protection—”

“No, you don’t need to do that. I’m just happy to be working with you, hyung… Everything else is secondary,” he interrupted.

‘He’s really good at making people feel touched. He’s a model pushover.’

“And you said you’d help, so we wouldn’t be late at all,” Rafael added.

Unfortunately, I was convinced that we were already late.

I wasn’t sure about everything else, but I felt like we were marching as slow as a turtle.

Of course, we were entering the forest a lot faster than the other parties, but the problem was that we were too cautious.

I knew it was best to look before one leaped into a river, but he was actually looking at every little thing before jumping into the river. The party’s rangers, who were up ahead, could have a cup of coffee, and we’d still be at the same spot.

Even Jo Hye-Jin was starting to feel annoyed…

‘She’s the type to do things by the book as well… ‘

But this was just too much…

The formation consisted of foreigners participating in the expedition, and they had no idea what was going on. Fortunately, they had a competent summoning mage because soldiers made of magic were marching along with them, which was a rare sight.

It also meant that the formation itself was strong and stable.

I could guarantee that monsters and humans would see them as a solid wall.

We couldn’t use teleport because of Jung Ha-Yan’s condition, but she was walking with Han Sora, so it seemed that she wanted to participate in the expedition as well.

Thronus, Dominions, and Jo Hye-Jin were here as well, and they maintained formation as if they were protecting an important figure.

It seemed that Rafael wanted to show me that he had changed a lot because he’d give orders or listen to any new information about the ongoing situation with a serious expression.

Such as…

“Any news from the rangers?”

And…

“Please search the area a little more thoroughly. If a third one were to appear, there’d be no guarantee that a fourth one wouldn’t appear. Hyung’s safety is the top priority here.”

And…

“How long do you think it’ll take? How are the preparations for the hunt? Have you made sure that the other variables are within the expected range? Report to me as soon as you receive news. What if we dispatch the rangers to see what type of monster it is?”

He'd call Lee Joo-Hyuk and Marian, who were his closest advisors, and come up with a strategy with them. Of course, one of the most important things that had to be done here was getting information. We weren't here to have fun and play games, after all.

Even a high-level adventurer would die if they made a mistake.

We basically had only a little information about this monster, so the protocol was to conduct more thorough research. However, Rafael's gaze seemed to be telling me something else.

He looked like he was begging me to look at him and see how much he had grown and that he was no longer the old Rafael.

He also seemed worried about not performing well during the hunt.

I was sure he didn't want to show his sloppy side to his benefactor. I was certain that was the reason why Rafael's party was so tense. They didn't want to miss even the tiniest detail, but it applied to me as well.

"Thro," I called out.

"Yes, Father," Thro answered.

"It looks like you've been doing some research. I'd like to hear your opinion," I requested.

"Okay."

The more information, the better…

"The monster's habits were very similar to trolls—a monster commonly seen in this forest," Thro said.

"Really?"

"Yes. Actually, they looked alike… I was in the process of confirming what I already knew, such as its claws, footprints, and their appearance when sticking close to a tree…" Thro answered.

"That's interesting. Domi, have you found anything?" I asked.

“I’m not at the stage where I can tell you anything for sure…” Domi replied.

“I see,” I said.

“If you’d like, I can tell you my opinion despite the lack of information,” Domi said.

“Go ahead.”

“I performed several tests on the monster that first appeared based on the information that Thro had provided to me. I couldn’t find out many things, but one assumption I can make is that this monster may have already existed long ago,” Domi explained.

“If your assumption is correct, then the first monster must’ve been a troll long ago,” I said.

“Yes, but I don’t know what kind of power made it mutate that way. I believe I came to a conclusion a bit too soon, so I need more time to verify the information that I have. Right now…” Domi trailed off.

“*Hmm…*”

“I didn’t have enough time to investigate, but it was the same for the second monster, Father. The two seemed similar, but they were completely different entities… If something made them mutate that way…” Domi paused again.

I wonder if that was the reason behind the manifestation of holy power inside them.

“I’d like to hear more. It’s fine if they haven’t been confirmed yet,” I requested.

“Well…” Domi said hesitantly.

“…”

‘They’re worried about making a mistake. I’m not that cold-hearted.’

“Actually, I succeeded in securing tissue samples that are found in both monsters, Father,” Domi informed me.

‘Great.’

“The problem is that the samples’ origin is unclear…” Domi added.

“Is there a way to find out?” I asked.

“T-To put it bluntly, I believe it’s the blood of the transcendent being that transformed those monsters. If holy power is the common trait between the two monsters, then—”

“Domi!” Thro exclaimed, casting a shocked look at Domi.

Domi hadn’t said anything yet, but she was implying that she’d be able to find the answer faster by comparing the samples to my blood.

“You’d be able to compare if you had my blood,” I said.

“T-That’s…”

“I’m not scolding you. I actually want to compliment you,” I told her.

‘I’m kind of scared of seeing my own blood, but—Ack, I’m scared.’

I placed a dagger on my finger, and blood started coming out of my finger. The children were surprised, and their faces turned pale. They definitely didn’t expect me to do something like this because they looked shocked.

Thro looked particularly shocked, which was kind of funny.

Domi snapped back to reality. Realizing what she had to do, she whipped out a small medicine bottle and extended it toward my bleeding finger with her trembling hands.

Soon, my blood filled up the small bottle.

“M-M-Me, too…”

‘Why are you standing in line, Ha-Yan?’

“I-I want one to keep, too,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

‘Fine, take it.’

“Would you like some as well, MIss Hye-Jin?” I asked.

“Stop saying such ridiculous things and get that treated, sir,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

It suddenly occurred to me that they were onto something here.

‘How absurd.’

Thronus and Dominions were probably right, especially Thronus. He wasn’t bold enough to ask for his father’s blood since nothing had yet to be confirmed. Fortunately, Dominions was more courageous when it came to something like this.

Since she grew up in the Black Swan Guild, she was skilled in experiments and gathering information, and she was exceptional when it came to drawing a conclusion out of nothing, which made me think she really was like Lee Ji-Hye.

Anyway, if Dominions was right, then those two were transformed by a god’s blood.

‘There’s a dungeon beneath the Vatican.’

Mole Saint’s Cozy Sanctuary.

For some reason, I had a feeling that I knew whose blood made those monsters mutate.

“Benigoa?”

Was it safe to assume that those anomalous monsters had consumed Benigoa’s blood?

It would be really funny if that was the case. I had some questions I personally wanted to ask the Vatican, but I felt like I already had the answers.

First of all, the templars.

‘Did you guys drink it too?’

For some reason, I became suspicious of them.

“…”

"…"

Deep underground in the Vatican…

"…"

'Ha… '

Could it be that Benigoa's corpse was there?

CHAPTER 910
SERA (10)

Was it really there?

I wanted to ask Benigoa, but I thought it would be useless to ask that kind of question.

Even if I were to ask her about the dungeon, she wouldn't tell me anything because that was the rule. The timing at which she did the dungeon update was indeed a bit strange, so it was only natural for me to think that her corpse was buried beneath the Vatican.

I was not sure if she had memories of what she had done when she was still a human being, but even if she had no memories of herself at the time, she still interfered, albeit unknowingly.

'It seems that she's the Mole Saint.'

I knew she wasn't familiar with worldly affairs, but this was pretty bad. I became certain of my assumption that she was stuck underground like a mole, which was the reason she got backstabbed. The assumption suddenly popped into my head, but I thought it was reasonable.

Otherwise, the Templars wouldn't exist. Three superhumans stayed there when the Order of Benigoa was founded. There was scarce information about them, which was probably the reason why my imagination was going wild, but…

"The fact that there's no information about *them* is strange," I said.

I was talking about how the Templars were founded, what they usually do, and why I had never really seen them, even though I had visited the Vatican so many times over the years.

Now that I thought about it, there were a few suspicious things. It was that they were a secret armed group, but they were still a part of the Vatican. Wait, no. Perhaps they

were not affiliated with the Vatican.

I considered the possibility of them being an independent organization rather than an organization affiliated with the Vatican.

I nodded at the thought because if they were truly using Benigoa's corpse to mass-produce the Templars, there was no way Father Basel would just stand by and watch them do that. He was a devoted follower of Benigoa, after all.

Father Basel was like an open book, so assuming he'd do something secretly without notifying me was a bit far-fetched… If he had broken bad, then the continent had no future.

'Saying that they're an independent organization is more convincing.'

I had never really thought about it until now.

The Templars were as strong as the Eight Seats. They could already walk with their heads held high before, but their power level had increased drastically, so they were definitely an influential organization.

A dungeon had appeared, and monsters weren't the only ones affected by it. If Mole Saint's Cozy Sanctuary was affecting the nearby regions, then it was highly likely that the Templars were being affected as well.

It was like the monsters had been upgraded using a cheat code, but this was merely an assumption on my end. I had no time to think deeply about it right now, but if we really do end up in that kind of situation, then the Templars wouldn't be happy about raiding that dungeon.

They'd probably think that it was Benigoa's gift to them.

'I should check it myself.'

"Miss Hye-Jin," I called out.

"Yes, sir," Jo Hye-Jin answered.

"It's nothing," I said.

“What is it?” Jo Hye-Jin asked.

“It’s nothing. I’ll tell you later,” I answered.

“What is it? Now I’m curious,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

“I just thought things might get worse than I imagined,” I told her.

“Is there still some serious matter we should be aware of?” Jo Hye-Jin asked.

“I’ll tell you everything once I’m certain. Once we return, tell everyone not to accept any requests, missions, or quests for the time being and be on standby. Please handle the expeditions that are going to take some time. If there are any guild members outside, please tell them to return to the guild as soon as possible,” I instructed.

“Should I message the guild master, who’s in the Republic right now?” Jo Hye-Jin asked.

“No, Hyun-Sung will be on standby in the Republic. If something happens, I’ll tell him myself. *Ah!* Also, please pass down the same message to the three major guilds as well,” I added.

“So it’s *that* serious. I knew it was a strong monster, but…” Jo Hye-Jin trailed off.

Yeah, it was a pretty strong monster, and it was evidenced by how the injured Sera and Cheru were running frantically away from it.

The first monster was originally a troll. If a simple mutant had gone on a rampage upon drinking Benigoa’s blood, then there were other threats we had to worry about. If a boss monster somewhere had obtained that kind of buff, it would definitely be a huge problem.

“We’ll pick up the pace. Tell the rangers to join the battle right away. Also, Joo-Hyuk…” Rafael instructed.

“Got it,” Lee Joo-Hyuk answered.

“Hyung,” Rafael said.

“Yes, Mr. Rafael,” I answered.

“I think Sera and Cheru are being chased by the third monster.” Rafael pointed out.

“*Ah!*” Jung Ha-Yan exclaimed.

“Don’t worry. I sent Joo-Hyuk just now. We’ll make sure to save them as quickly as possible,” Rafael reassured.

“Sera… Is Sera okay?” Han Sora asked.

“Yes, Miss Han Sora,” Rafael replied.

The boys seemed to be struggling, but their injuries weren’t life-threatening injuries. The two looked disheveled as they ran through the forest.

The monster was swinging its hands nonstop to try and catch the tiny boys.

“What should we do? Sub Guild Master? Please do something about Sera.”

Jung Ha-Yan looked worried, but she was trying to read my reaction.

“It’ll be fine, Miss Sora,” I said.

“*Ah…*”

‘Don’t be so anxious. It’s really fine.’

“He needs to go a little faster. Please tell him to go faster,” Han Sora requested.

“I’m sure he’s there by now, so don’t worry, Miss Han Sora. We’re moving as fast as we can as well,” Rafael told her.

“Miss Jung Ha-Yan, please do something. Sub Guild Master, you’re not just going to abandon Sera, right? Right? Is this why… Is this why…” Han Sora trailed off.

‘Is this why you sealed Miss Jung Ha-Yan’s magic?’

Han Sora seemed to have misunderstood something, but…

‘What does Han Sora take me for? You really think I would seal Ha-Yan’s magic just to get rid of Seraphim? She must still think I’m pretending to like Ha-Yan. You think you’re

the only one who cares about her? I want her to be happy as well.'

"Please, take pity. Our Sera. I feel really bad for him. *Heuk…"* Han Sora begged.

Han Sora's enthusiastic performance made the mood become incredibly tense. The children wouldn't die so easily, and they'd soon stumble upon Lee Joo-Hyuk, but Han Sora just couldn't bear to watch.

I was sure the only thing she was worried about was something bad happening to Sera, whom she raised with care.

Obviously, her worry was contagious.

Thro and Domi knew what was going on, but they still seemed worried about their brothers. Of course, they didn't show it on the outside. Meanwhile, Jung Ha-Yan's face was turning pale. She was probably imagining something bad happening to Sera.

"*Ah…"*

Normally, people would realize that something was precious when they were about to lose it. Ha-Yan had already accepted Sera into her life, so she was worried about him. I could tell that she was only pretending to be calm.

"Joo-Hyuk must be there now, hyung. Don't worry, Miss Jung Ha-Yan, Miss Han Sora," Rafael explained.

The girls sighed in relief.

"I'm glad," Han Sora said.

"I think the raid is going to start soon. We should move to a—"

"No, I'd like to see it myself. Tell him to bring Sera and Cheru to me as soon as they are rescued," I ordered.

"I'll let him know," Rafael said.

I thought Han Sora was holding Jung Ha-Yan's hand tightly, but it was the other way around. I felt kind of bad because it was like a sign that she was gradually getting worried, but she didn't show any reaction that needed my attention.

“It’ll be fine, Miss Jung Ha-Yan,” Han Sora reassured her.

“Yeah…”

‘Yeah, nothing will happen.’

Lee Joo-Hyuk finally encountered the monster.

The way he held up his sword to block its path seemed like he was simply posing to look cool, but I did feel relieved to see him there.

His stats weren’t as good as mine, but he had a ton of experience against monsters. He dodged all of its attacks as if he knew its attack patterns beforehand, and he looked pretty cool doing that.

Minimal movement, maximum efficiency, and saying lines one would normally see in dramas—Lee Joo-Hyuk had it all.

- Good job, kids.

- W-What should we do? Cheru? D-Did Father come to rescue us?

- That’s right.

- C-Cheru, did you hear that? You heard it, right? *Heuk…* Really? Did Father really…

- Father Lee Ki-Young ordered me to bring you two safely to him right away. Let’s treat your wounds first. Here, take the potion.

- R-Really?

- Yeah.

The truth was kind of different, but I still needed him to bring them in because I had many things to say to them.

- W-We can fight too. Sera, you can fight, right?

- Y-Yeah.

-…

- Please let us fight. We can be helpful as well.

-…

- *Whoo…*

- Please…

- Then support me, but don't push yourselves. Our goal is to hold out until the main force arrives here. The rangers are going to help you in the rear. We're going to gather information about this monster first before hunting it down. Study its patterns and store all of that information in your head.

'That's a classic strategy.'

- Keep thinking about what the monster is capable of doing and move according to that.

'He's a great teacher.'

It seemed that Lee Joo-Hyuk and Cheru's chemistry was great. The goal was to slowly understand the monster through fighting it, but Cheru seemed to be thinking that he had to achieve something, as he threw himself into battle.

- Don't be hasty. That's not how you should fight. Our role isn't to finish it off. That was extremely childish of you.

- O-Okay!

- Okay…

- The right… it's on the right side. Get back. I need to see if it has a long-ranged skill that is capable of suppressing us. You with the gold hair. Be my rearguard. Anything is fine but cast spells that are helpful.

Lee Joo-Hyuk was better than I thought.

- U-Understood!

- Let's go.

- Okay.

Cheru cast a surprised gaze at Lee Joo-Hyuk.

Cheru probably thought that he could learn something from Lee Joo-Hyuk, and it was an intuition that he had honed by training with Cha Hee-Ra.

Cheru probably found it interesting that Lee Joo-Hyuk was a top-ranking adventurer despite his ordinary physique. From decision-making and combat sense to insane movement mechanics, Cheru probably thought that he could learn a lot from Lee Joo-Hyuk.

Lee Joo-Hyuk would say strange lines from time to time, but he was *really* serious in situations like this.

- *Roooooooar!*

- I'll go left.

- Okay!

'Is there nothing unique about this monster?'

I observed the fight all the way to the third phase, thinking that things would take a turn during its third phase, but I didn't really notice anything.

The giant monster was capable of wielding holy power. It occasionally fired a burst of holy power, but the way it wielded that holy power made it obvious to everyone that its Intelligence stat was low.

It seemed that this was going to be a normal raid, which betrayed my expectations.

And that was when a figure sporting large wings decapitated the monster before landing on the ground.

- *Ah…*

-…

The children's jaws dropped at the sudden turn of events, and even Lee Joo-Hyuk stared in astonishment at the newcomer.

At first, I thought it was Rafael, but Rafael… he was standing next to me right now.

- Who are you?

- You don't have to be wary of me.

- I asked you a question.

Upon taking a closer look at the mysterious figure, I muttered, "The Templars."

'These bastards actually have wings. They didn't have those wings at first, did they?'

CHAPTER 911
SERA (11)

He had the same hair color as Benigoa and was sporting the armor of the Holy Knights.

The most important part here was his stats. If I had to compare, his stats were similar to Rafael's. He was strong enough to compare to a top adventurer. Obviously, I had never seen or heard of such a strong Templar. In addition, reaching the same heights as Rafael was…

'Difficult… '

Rafael would only look weak whenever he was compared to Kim Hyun-Sung.

He was actually really strong. It was just that he wasn't as strong as Hyun-Sung. He was a superhuman when it came to stats. He was kind of unreliable before the war with the Outer Gods, but that was no longer the case.

He had finally perfected himself, but the mysterious figure before me was on the same level as Rafael, which was a threatening sight to me.

It was too early to assume that he and I were on opposite sites, but it didn't hurt to be cautious. It was like the first time I saw the Four Angels during the war with the Outer Gods.

It was natural for Lee Joo-Hyuk to be wary of the mysterious figure

His emotionless face reminded me of Kim Hyun-Sung in his early days, but there was a difference in their appearance.

I wasn't sure whether he had been trained to do that or not, but he looked like he had killed his emotions.

"Sera!" Han Sora shouted.

“A-A-Auntie…” Sera stuttered.

“Are you okay?” Han Sora asked.

“*Heuk…* Auntieee…” Sera cried.

Meanwhile, Sera and Han Sora were having a tearful reunion,

Sera glanced at Jung Ha-Yan, probing her reaction.

Jung Ha-Yan wanted to reunite with Sera as well.

Han Sora noticed that, so she said, “You should… greet your mother.”

“…”

“Miss Jung Ha-Yan, Sera is here. Please hug him,” she said.

“I-I-I’m glad…” Jung Ha-Yan paused.

‘You should finish your sentence, Ha-Yan. Be honest.’

Jung Ha-Yan was looking around while we were walking, which made the atmosphere awkward. The three were awkward around each other while the Holy Sword Warrior’s party was minding their own business.

Marian was busy treating Lee Joo-Hyuk, while Rafael was staring ahead while standing next to me.

“Father…” Cheru said.

“Well… I’m sor—”

“Thro and Domi, take Cheru and Sera to their rooms,” I ordered.

“Yes, sir.”

I didn’t bother making eye contact with Cheru because his treatment wasn’t important right now. Moreover, the boys had gotten pretty lucky as well.

My attention was on the Templar, who was standing quietly with his head down. Lee Joo-Hyuk was soon patched up, and he reported the situation to me.

The Templar's wings were still spread wide open as he greeted, "Hello, Father Lee Ki-Young."

"You don't have to bow your head, *um*…" I trailed off.

"You can call me Gen," Gen answered. He looked friendly and was extremely polite. I could also tell that he respected me. He looked so sincere that perhaps I thought badly of him for no reason.

I honestly couldn't understand why I felt that way, as I was Benigoa's son and the God of Sacrifice and Revival in his eyes. Of course, he'd act this way to me, as they had a duty to protect me.

However, I was not sure whether they were showing the same respect to the other cardinals or not.

"Okay, Mr. Gen, then," I said.

For now, I had to behave the same way as him.

I had to become a man devoted to Benigoa. I had to become someone who knew nothing other than being warm and affectionate.

I immediately put on my business smile, and I didn't forget to sprinkle some soft light on purpose. I looked so holy that just looking at me would make people stop breathing unconsciously.

'This is me, damn it.'

"First of all, I would like to thank you," I said.

"I was simply doing my job," Gen said.

"I'm sure it wasn't easy dealing with this kind of monster… I'm really grateful. I'm sure you expected this, but can I ask for your affiliation?" I asked.

"…"

Gen quietly revealed his hidden badge to me. He didn't answer, but he had proven that he was a Templar. I wasn't surprised or shocked. I simply nodded quietly.

"I see," I commented.

The Templars had never really shown their faces to me, so how come they suddenly appeared before me?

"…"

"…"

There was a moment of awkward silence, and I wasn't exactly happy about it, as I wanted to continue the conversation.

"I don't know how to say this, but…" I trailed off.

"Please speak comfortably, Father Lee Ki-Young," Gen said.

"Can I ask why you're here? And… you look like you've obtained a brand-new power," I asked, going straight to the point. "I assume it's because of the anomalies that's been happening recently on the continent…"

"You're right, sir. The Templars have recognized the seriousness of the current situation and are concerned about it. Our mission so far has been solely focused on protecting the cardinals, but I came here because I was dispatched for a special task," Gen replied.

"That's…"

"It's the will of Goddess Benigoa. My appearance right now is proof of that," Gen added.

'You've never heard her voice, so what do you mean by 'the will of Goddess Benigoa'?'

Obviously, I had no time to confirm his words. The anomaly had occurred around the capital of the Democratic Country, and the brand-new that he possessed could be explained by saying that Benigoa had bestowed it upon them.

"Then…"

“We’re conducting our own investigation right now, Father Lee Ki-Young,” Gen said.

“I see.”

“So, on behalf of the other Templars, I would like to ask you this…” Gen paused.

‘Did he come here with a purpose, or is it coincidence?’

“What is it?” I asked.

“I would like you to leave this to us,” Gen requested.

“What?”

“The brand-new power that Goddess Benigoa had bestowed upon us exists for calming this chaos. Dealing with these otherworldly monsters is a mission bestowed upon us by the Goddess Herself, and we’ll use this power to do that,” Gen said.

‘This bastard definitely came here to tell me that, but it’s also because of that monster’s presence. However, he knew my location as well… ‘

“I’m sorry, but I have no control over this,” I informed him.

“…”

“Mr. Rafael’s party has control over this… so I can’t make that decision,” I said.

“*Ah…*”

“Mr. Rafael believes that these anomalies are happening because the dungeons nearby are running rampant,” I added.

‘I’m sure you know that a dungeon has appeared beneath your house.’

“I believe… that you’d be able to… convince him somehow…” Gen mumbled.

‘How am I supposed to convince him? I mean, I could tell him not to do it, and Rafael will just agree, but I can’t do that.’

“Unfortunately, Mr. Rafael isn’t part of the Blue Guild. To be exact, he’s a free

adventurer with the right to access all quests and dungeons on the continent. The Democratic Country and the Continental Protection Management Committee have issued him his license, and I don't have the power to stop him. I'd like to help you, but…" I trailed off.

"There has to be a way…" Gen muttered.

'I just told you there isn't a way… '

"Mr. Rafael was also chosen by Goddess Benigoa. I understand what you're saying, but I'm sure Goddess Benigoa doesn't want you to exclude Mr. Rafael and the other groups that she has chosen.

"Ah! Of course, I'm not denying your words here. I'm simply thinking from her point of view, as I am her son, after all," I explained.

"…"

"Many things had happened to the continent. There was that crisis, and there have been many incidents that affected the fate of the continent.

"In the end, those incidents were resolved, but I wasn't the only one who made the effort to resolve those incidents. Everyone on the continent—the adventurers, the men, and the women… they made the continent into what it is today, and it's all because they wanted to protect it. If there really is a new threat to the continent, then…" I trailed off.

"…"

"The Templars don't have to take care of it alone. It's a problem that all of us will have to handle," I added.

Gen frowned. He probably thought I'd agree to his request. What would those people know when all they had been doing was praying and having shady parties in their basement? Actually, some of them knew something, but this guy definitely had no idea.

"In that case… are you willing to hand over this monster's corpse?" Gen asked.

"I'll leave that up to Mr. Rafael," I replied.

Obviously, Gen was trying to steal our loot here.

He had appeared out of nowhere and decapitated the head of the monster that we were hunting. To make matters worse, he was demanding ownership of the corpse.

'If we sue you for this, you'll definitely get punished, man.'

Killstealing had recently become a social issue, after all.

"Mr. Rafael?" I called out.

"*Ah*… I'm sorry, but that won't be possible," Rafael said.

I knew I could trust you.

"Of course, we fully recognize your contribution, and we can acknowledge some ownership, but the only offer we can make is forty percent… I think it's best if I talk to my party's lawyer about the details," Rafael said.

It was my first time seeing Rafael acting in such a business-like manner.

"*Whoo…"*

"I'm sorry I can't be of much help," I said.

"It's okay, sir. However…" Gen paused.

"Yes?"

"I beg you once again… Can't you hand this over to us?" Gen asked.

" I don't get it," I said.

"…"

"Why must you go that far?" I questioned.

"I can't… tell you right now," Gen answered.

'You must be thinking that someone will be in trouble if you say it. Who is it? Will it be

me? Or will it be you guys?'

I wanted more information, as I really didn't have that much information no matter which angle I looked at the matter.

What if I was just making a mountain out of a molehill?

I'd look incredibly stupid by then.

'Perhaps I should just test the waters first.'

"Actually, there's something I would like to discuss with you as well, Mr. Gen," I said.

"What is it?" Gen asked.

"It's not something we should discuss here… Do you mind if we move elsewhere?" I asked.

"Sure," Gen replied.

'Well, it's nothing special, but I'll set the mood by looking all serious and solemn.'

"Actually, I've been dreaming of Goddess Benigoa these days," I said.

"…"

"I can't really describe it, and it wasn't a familiar sight either.

"However, I suspect that I was in a den of demons in those dreams. I saw a scene so terrible that I don't dare describe it with my own mouth.

"Those filthy demons, who deserve to be punished by the heavens, have injured her holy body and were drinking her blood. In my dreams, she spoke but in a tired and agonized voice," I explained.

'Dirty demon bastards. They're seriously psychopathic and crazy monsters. Can you even imagine how horrible that sight was?'

I started crying without realizing it.

Benigoa's lips were trembling, and her face was ashen gray; her holy teardrops fell like jade beads to the cold ground.

I stared at Gen with a guilty face, looking like I had told him something I wasn't supposed to say to him, which could result in him becoming cursed. Anyway, I started breathing in ragged pants as well.

"'Help me. Help me.' That's what she said…" I told him.

CHAPTER 912
SERA (12)

"She was asking for help," I said.

Gen's expression didn't change, and he was just staring at me quietly.

Actually, he looked like he was trying to empathize with me, and it bothered me because he looked as if he understood me.

It was to the point that I questioned whether he actually understood what I said or not. I thought perhaps I was being *too* indirect, but I didn't really think that was the case. I was just telling him what I wanted to say.

'Benigoa's corpse. I know it's in the basement of your house. What are you going to do about it? That power that you've obtained… Didn't you get that after drinking Benigoa's blood?'

I wasn't sure if he was feigning ignorance or if the Templars didn't consider themselves as those demons, but there was definitely something wrong with the Templars.

Those guys had basically mutated after drinking Benigoa's blood. Gen probably thought that the demons I had described were the monsters, as he probably believed that what they were doing was holy and right.

If my assumptions were right, then there were two conclusions I could draw.

These bastards were either crazy, or they knew the reason behind this phenomenon.

I was sure they also knew why these monsters had mutated in this manner. One of the reasons this guy named Gen came here was to hide that fact, and asking for ownership over the monster was probably one of his missions…

'It's been a while since I had to do this much thinking.'

I came up with various assumptions because I was curious about a lot of things.

If the Templars' home base was the Mole Saint's Sanctuary, then where were they living right now? They were probably living inside the dungeon itself, or they could have become a part of the dungeon.

It was rare, but there were cases where humans became boss monsters of dungeons.

A long time ago, there were quite a few humans living in dungeons, but there wasn't a law that forbade humans from living in dungeons in the current era.

There was also a high chance that they couldn't enter the altar and were trying to discreetly raid the dungeon.

I was still crying as I stared at the silent Gen's face. A human's face could convey a lot of information.

'Perhaps I should change my stance a bit. I wanted him to think that he didn't have to be wary of me. Should I act weaker? Look more pitiful and pathetic? I hope it's not too sudden of a change in attitude. It should be fine since he misinterpreted my threat.'

As expected, he reacted, and he looked like he was going to break down at any moment. How many believers could ignore the tears of a devoted saint?

I should have done this from the very beginning. Something was a bit off, but he was still a follower of the Order of Benigoa.

"Are you okay, Father Lee Ki-Young?" Gen asked.

'Am I okay? Are you seriously asking me that?'

"Yes, I-I'm… fine," I answered.

"I think I can understand the sorrow that you're feeling right now. Of course, the pain I'm feeling isn't as painful as the pain you must endure…" Gen said.

'Are you comforting me right now? Really?'

"I'm sorry… for suddenly showing this side of me…" I apologized.

“You don’t have to be embarrassed, Father Lee Ki-Young. You’re being honest and sincere. You’re crying for her. There’s no need to feel embarrassed,” Gen said.

“But—”

“You can act more comfortably around me,” Gen interrupted.

“You mean…”

“Obviously, I know my words aren’t enough to comfort your broken heart… but if you’re carrying a heavy burden… and you need someone to talk to…” Gen paused.

‘You’d really do that for me?’

“I’m glad that I can comfort you even slightly, so please don’t feel uncomfortable around me,” Gen requested.

“It’s really strange,” I said.

“What is?” Gen asked.

“The fact that I’m saying this to someone I met for the first time…” I answered.

“…”

“It was something I’ve been wanting to tell someone…” I said.

‘Yeah, I’ve been keeping it to myself this whole time. Honestly, how can I talk about this when it’s so disturbing? The sight of the demons drinking Goddess Benigoa’s holy blood was such a horrible sight. Imagining it alone makes me feel like passing out.

‘Can you imagine it? Can you even imagine that sight?

‘Who can I confide this to? Of course, this is our first meeting, and I know we’re not at the stage where I can tell you things like this, but I’m mentally vulnerable right now.

‘I needed to vent this out to someone. I needed someone who’d listen to me without judging me, and it couldn’t be someone familiar to me. I needed someone new but could understand the thoughts of the Saint of Light.’

“I’m sure it was hard for you,” Gen said.

“I was more about Goddess Benigoa experiencing hardships… than my own hardships,” I told him.

“Goddess Benigoa…” Gen mumbled.

“I honestly haven’t heard her voice for a while now. If I did something wrong…”

“You did nothing wrong, Father Lee Ki-Young. If you did…” Gen paused.

“Yes?”

“It’s nothing,” he said.

“I’d appreciate it if you could tell me more details. Do you know something… Mr. Gen?” I asked.

“It’s nothing. It’s just…” Gen paused.

“Yes?”

“I was simply thinking that everything has a cause. Maybe we—the Order—or the entire continent might’ve done something to make her angry,” Gen continued.

“Are you implying there’s a problem with the Order right now?” I asked.

‘Let’s find out more.’

“That’s not the case,” he replied.

‘He’s backing out. Is there something you’re not satisfied about? Have the Templars been talking about it? You guys are questioning the direction the Vatican is trying to take right now, right? Right? Or are you guys questioning the continent instead? Whatever it is, there’s room for consideration.’

“…”

In the end, the Templars seemed to be thinking that they hadn’t made any mistakes, and I understood that thought process.

They had obtained that power from Benigoa through a religious ritual that had been passed down for generations. There hadn't been any problems with the ritual until now, so they probably thought that something went wrong somewhere with the recent incidents.

The main possibility was that the current Vatican was corrupted.

The Vatican was a religious group, but there were bound to be a few bad apples everywhere. Grandpa Basel was sensitive to that kind of stuff, but he wasn't smart enough to weed out the bad apples. In fact, I could still remember seeing a few members of the Vatican when I visited that black market as Lee Ki-Yeon.

"Then, do you mind if I ask what you think of the current Order?" I asked.

"Strictly speaking, we have no say in the direction that the Order wants to take. We're just a group of people whose task is to protect the cardinals—"

"That has always been the case until now," I interrupted.

'Not anymore.'

"That's…"

"I'm not an idiot," I said.

I was an innocent, weak, and pitiful saint, but I wasn't an ignoramus. I was actually pretty smart. Of course, people skilled in politics would probably laugh at me, but I was wise, bold enough to protect my beliefs using my own methods, and unshakable.

"I don't know the exact reason you showed yourself, and I also don't know why the Templars are suddenly showing up, even though they've been in hiding until now, but I believe that there has been a change of heart.

"I'm sure there's a reason why Goddess Benigoa has decided to bestow those powers upon you. I don't think people like you will refuse to acknowledge her wishes," I explained.

"…"

"Is the Order aware of this?" I questioned.

"…"

"If you're uncomfortable with me asking these questions…"

"No, I'm not uncomfortable, however…" Gen paused.

'You still haven't opened your heart to me?'

"I simply think it's not time to tell you yet," he continued.

"I see," I said.

'Let's look sad.'

"I understand," I told him.

I thought it would be best to make him feel like I had drawn the line and wouldn't interfere with the Order's issues. After all, I was nothing more than an honorary cardinal. I was ultimately an outsider when it came to the Order.

Of course, I wasn't really going to stop interfering, but he had to feel that way so he'd open up to me.

"I'd like to walk with you for a bit…" I said.

"I'll walk with you," Gen said.

'Of course, you will.'

I wasn't sure what I was doing when I still hadn't taken care of the problem with Ha-Yan and Sera. I still needed to punish Cheru as well, but I thought it'd be better to do that once Gen was no longer around.

Rafael followed me, but I shook my head to tell him that he didn't need to come with me.

"Hyung," Rafael said.

"It's fine. You can trust him," I told him.

“But…”

“It’s really fine, Mr. Rafael,” I repeated.

‘You don’t have to be so wary. You really think he’s going to kidnap me here?’

“Then…”

“There’s something I need to discuss with Mr. Gen alone, Mr. Rafael. Of course, you’re not an outsider, but…” I paused.

“*Whoo…”*

‘What are you going to do about it? Just accept it.’

Obviously, Rafael still had his guard up. I was sure he was focused on my safety more than ever, but there was no point saying that when Gen was here.

It was better to show him that I trusted him and that we were a team.

There wasn’t really a trail we could walk on.

The forest was dangerous, and there wasn’t an actual road, but it wasn’t an issue for us. I spread my wings, and Gen nodded quietly. The dense forest brightened up, and I attracted the gazes of Thro and Domi, who were standing from afar.

The wings of light were both holy and beautiful.

It was like a symbol that reminded people that I was the Son of a Goddess rather than a human being. The quality of my wings was vastly higher than the quality of Gen’s wings.

Light would scatter everywhere whenever I flapped my wings, and the sight of it alone was enough to make every evil thought go away. I was a bit embarrassed to say this myself, but every single priest who had seen my wings so far was captivated by it.

“Shall we get going?” I asked.

Gen nodded quietly. I rose slowly into the air, as I still hadn’t gotten used to flying,

but he matched my pace and flew slowly with me.

'We'll use this to show people that we're on the same side.'

"I'm kind of happy," I said.

"What?"

"I'm happy that I met someone who truly thinks about Goddess Benigoa," I answered.

"…"

"I'm sure Goddess Benigoa is happy as well. She'll be happy that a new saint appeared for this continent," I added.

"That's…"

"I'm not good enough. I have fancy names like the Son of Light and God of Sacrifice and Revival, but I'm weak, and I'm an idiot as well. I could only make it this far because of the people who have been helping me and supporting me. Everything is all thanks to the people who have been protecting our faith and beliefs together," I said.

"…"

"I think there's a new threat on the continent. The things that are happening right now can't be considered normal…" I said.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young…"

"But I believe we can overcome it. Goddess Benigoa won't give us a trial we can't overcome. She will always give us the *power* to overcome any trial," I said.

'I'm talking about your wings. That's the power.*'*

"The continent has always been like that. There are threats everywhere, but the continent becomes a bit stronger and tougher after overcoming every threat. The trials caused us pain and hardships, but I believe that those pain and hardships are the reason we get to live on this beautiful continent and look at its blue sky," I told him.

The starlight in the night sky represented Thro, while the sunset represented Hyun-Sung.

“It’s a beautiful view. Don’t you agree?” I asked.

“Yes.”

The blue sky and the sunlight shining down between the clouds created a dazzling slight.

“We’ll be able to see this sight again once everything is over,” I said.

‘Of course, this bastard won’t be seeing this beautiful sky again.’

CHAPTER 913
SERA (13)

"Goodbye," I said.

"Thank you… for welcoming me like this," Gen said.

"We're all brothers under Goddess Benigoa. You can visit anytime you want. I will always be waiting for you," I told him.

After taking care of a few things, it was time to send him away.

I wasn't sure if he had fallen for my trap, but it was highly likely that he liked me.

I couldn't check to see why, but a heart-to-heart conversation with the Son of Benigoa in midair was an experience one couldn't buy.

At the very least, he wasn't going to be hostile toward me. Since I had shown him the nice side of me, he'd probably think that I was useful, which was even better. I was worried that perhaps I showed him my friendly side a bit too suddenly, but…

'It's natural because Gen and I were bound by religion.'

Yeah, religion. There was nothing more effective than religion when it came to connecting strangers with each other. We weren't born in the same place, and we didn't grow up in the same place as well.

However, we were brothers serving the same goddess.

"If you don't mind me asking, where are you planning on going next?" I asked.

"I need to report what happened here," Gen replied.

"You're talking about your mission… *Ah*… come to think of it…" I said.

"That's right. Although, I couldn't get what I wanted…" Gen said.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t help,” I told him.

“I completely understand your position, so you don’t have to worry so much. I actually feel bad because I feel like I had put you in a difficult position…” Gen said.

“Not at all. I enjoyed our time together. There’s nothing more enjoyable than talking about religion and Goddess Benigoa. You use your powers for the continent and for the Order of Benigoa, and I enjoyed my time with you. I meant it when I said you can visit me anytime,” I said.

Perhaps it was just me, but I saw Gen smiling slightly. Yeah, he was smiling.

“Consider it a place you can rest comfortably,” I added.

“Thank you, Father Lee Ki-Young,” Gen said.

“*Um…”* I paused.

“Yes?”

“I hope we see each other again,” I told him.

We’d probably see each other soon, and we’d talk deeply about religion over wine by then.

I’d visit him, as I had a feeling that I would have to visit the Vatican soon.

I had no idea what exactly was going on, but there was definitely something going on inside the Vatican.

Father Basel hadn’t said anything because he didn’t want to burden me, but the fact that the Templars were getting involved meant that there was a huge change. The Templars were an independent organization, but they were still a part of the Order of Benigoa, so I expected that there would be a discussion soon.

A miracle was power and authority. The miracles bestowed upon the Templars were worth using. It wasn’t what they wanted, but I was sure the Templars were under a ton of attention in the Order right now.

‘I’m sure Father Basel is having a headache over this. After all, he’s in the final stages of

his life, but he suddenly has to deal with something like this… '

"*Whoo…"* I sighed.

"He doesn't seem like a very nice person," Rafael said.

"What?" I asked.

"That man. There's something off about him, Hyung. I can't really say what it is… but it's strange, don't you think? He has the same wings as those monsters capable of wielding holy power. His holy power feels the same as the holy power coming from that monster as well, and there's something 'dark' about his expression…" Rafael answered.

'Yeah, I feel the same way, but you don't need to react so seriously.'

"I appreciate you worrying about me, but I'm also a follower of the Order of Benigoa, Mr. Rafael," I reminded him.

"I-I'm sorry," Rafael said.

"It's fine. I know what you're worried about and that you need to keep all situations in mind, Mr. Rafael," I said.

"Yes, t-that's what I meant. I'm just saying we shouldn't put our guard down, but we achieved a lot today. We were able to hunt for new samples… and I think we made some progress with our research. Marian seemed to have gotten a lead," Rafael updated.

"Is that right?" I asked.

"Yes. I think we're getting closer to the dungeon," Rafael answered.

'It's in the basement of the Vatican.'

"I have a feeling that this won't be a simple dungeon raid…" Rafael commented.

'All right, but I'm tired, so just leave.'

"I-I've been kind of bothersome, right? Rest up, Hyung," Rafael said.

'At least he's quick-witted… '

I was honestly kind of tired. I had a lot to do and a lot to think about.

Normally, I'd talk to him, but I needed time to rest as well.

"That's not true, Mr. Rafael. However, there are many things I need to think about… I also have that issue with Sera and Cheru," I told him.

"*Ah*… r-right," Rafael said.

"Moreover, the Order is in a bad situation right now. I'm thinking about visiting the Order soon," I said.

"Are you going to lead the prayer service?" Rafael asked.

"I'm not—Actually, that's not a bad idea," I replied.

'Yeah, I should try that. No, I have to do that.'

I had been avoiding getting involved with the Vatican, as getting deeply involved with them would definitely be exhausting. Strictly speaking, I was an outsider as well. Of course, none of the followers treated me like one since I was the Son of Benigoa, but I had too many responsibilities that I hadn't been able to focus on the Order.

It was one of the reasons why I couldn't reveal the reason I wanted to give more power to Father Basel.

Father Basel wanted me to be more deeply involved with the Order, but doing that would undoubtedly attract a ton of attention.

I turned to Rafael and saw his sparkling eyes. I had a feeling that things would become more troublesome if I told him what was going on.

"How many times have you been there?" I asked.

Tens of thousands of followers were waiting for the prayer service, which could be considered the Sacred Democratic Country's biggest event. It would also be broadcast live all over the continent.

This was why there were so many things we had to prepare and worry about.

From the clothes to the ceremony, it was an event that made everyone tense, including Father Basel, Oscar, the three major guilds of Lindel, and the vendors involved in the event. There was no way we could do something like that on a regular basis.

"I've attended all of the prayer services so far, Hyung. It's thanks to the Vatican being considerate, but it was still hard," Rafael said.

'I remember it, too. You always sit in the front as well.'

"Can you tell me in advance what time it will take place? It doesn't matter if you don't tell me, but since there are many things going on these days… I think it's best if I adjust my schedule to accommodate it," Rafael asked.

'Kim Hyun-Sung will probably come as well. Actually, I can make sure that he won't know.'

"I'm not sure. I'd like to do it as fast as possible. I also need to hear from the Order about their stance on the current incident… There's also a chance that the Templars are involved. I'm embarrassed because it feels like I've been neglecting the prayer service too much… but I'm sure the Vatican will welcome it," I explained.

"*Ah*, is it because of the recent incident…" Rafael asked.

"That's right," I replied.

'Yeah. You're the reason I'm going to do this annoying prayer service is because of you.

Actually, it wasn't because of Rafael.

I wanted to be more deeply involved with the Vatican. Moreover, the dungeon was located in their basement, so they were inevitably connected to it in some way.

Things would be easier if Father Basel had absolute power in the Order, but if they were in the middle of a political war, I had to offer him my help. I also needed to get closer to Gen. More importantly, I had to move the stage to the Vatican so that Rafael's party would discover the Mole Saint's Cozy Sanctuary.

“I’ll be heading in, Mr. Rafael,” I said.

“I’m sorry I kept clinging onto you. Also… I’m really happy,” Rafael said.

“How about we pray together when we get the chance?” I suggested.

“*Ah!* Really? Can we?” Rafael asked.

‘Wait, I didn’t think he’d actually agree. I wasn’t saying that he wasn’t worthy of praying with me. I just felt uncomfortable praying with someone.’

With that, I smiled quietly and answered him in a vague way. “I-I’m heading in.”

‘Shit, I really should go in.’

I sighed and entered the tent. I saw Seraphim and Cherubim sitting in a corner.

‘Ah… ‘

“Father… *Um*…”

I waved my hand lightly, and the boys left the room. I wonder if Han Sora had brought them here. I was sure I instructed her to give them a place to rest.

The cute traitors left the tent anxiously as if they were puppies that got drenched by the rain.

“*Ah*, Sera,” I said.

“Y-Yes?” Sera answered.

“Go to your mother,” I instructed.

“B-But…”

“Go to her,” I repeated.

“Y-Yes, sir,” Sera said.

‘I think she’s really feeling lost right now.

Now that I thought about it…

'I wonder how long she's going to hide it for.'

Jung Ha-Yan was quiet because she was afraid that I'd notice the fact that she couldn't use her magic for some reason. I thought about meeting up with her or creating a situation where the truth would inevitably be revealed.

I still had some time left, so I decided to send her a message.

[Ha-Yan, where are you?]

[I'm currently resting with Sora. Is something wrong, Oppa?]

[I might have to visit the Capital. Are you still not feeling well?]

[Yes… I'm sorry… But why are you going to the Capital?]

[I'm thinking about holding a prayer service.]

[What? Really?]

[Yeah.]

[I want to go with you!]

[Shouldn't you rest?]

[I still… want to go with you.]

I couldn't really get her reaction just on the message alone.

- L-Looks like oppa is going to hold a prayer service at the Vatican!

- Really?

- Y-Yeah. T-That's why he's going to the capital.

- You told him you weren't feeling well, right?

- I-I still need to attend the prayer service. Y-You know the outfit he wears every time he prays? I-I'll be able to see it this time. I'm going to record it. W-Will you do it, Sora? I-I should be able to sit in the front row this time as well, right? L-Last time… I sat in the second row.

- That's because… it was an invitational prayer service, and the leaders of each order needed to sit at the front. I'm sure you'll be able to sit in the first row this time. I'll put in the request in advance.

- *Huh?* Sera, you're here. Miss Jung Ha-Yan, Sera is here. You said you were going to compliment him, right? He completed his mission well. Our Sera. I know you didn't finish it, but I heard how courageous you were.

- *Ah… ah… ah…*

- But you shouldn't do anything dangerous like that again, got it? At least do it when your mother or I'm there…

- Okay, Auntie…

- Miss Jung Ha-Yan, you should say something as well.

- *Ah*… right…

For some reason, I was embarrassed by how awkward Jung Ha-Yan was acting right now.

Meanwhile, Sera was staring at Jung Ha-Yan with dazzling eyes.

All of a sudden, my hand mirror vibrated. I looked at it and was surprised.

[Today, I have some good news for everyone.]

'Ah… '

[You see, I'll be joining the prayer service that the honorary cardinal will be hosting soon. The exact date hasn't been decided yet, but I'm writing this post because I wanted to share the news with everyone. #HonoraryCardinal #HolySwordWarrior #OrderofBenigoaPrayerService #BeHappyEveryone #SeeYouSoon]

I knew it…

My hand mirror wouldn't stop vibrating.

"Damn it, why did you post that?" I complained.

'Is that guy crazy?'

CHAPTER 914
SERA (14)

"It's been a while, Father Basel," I greeted.

"*Oh!* Father Lee Ki-Young!" Father Basel greeted back.

It felt like it had been a while since we saw each other. His face revealed many different emotions, including joy as well as a profound respect toward me, which was a massive change compared to the last time we saw each other.

He was trying to accept my wish to remain human, but it appeared like he still couldn't hold in his respect toward me. I understood his reaction. I was the God of Sacrifice and Revival, after all. I was the closest to Benigoa, and I had also been to the afterlife.

'Why does this old man look so haggard though?'

He looked like he had aged a lot, and it wasn't just me. I was sure everyone had noticed that as well. I assumed it was because he was stressed about many things, and I couldn't help but feel sad at the fact that even he couldn't escape the ruthless passage of time.

'I wonder if Deok-Gu will become old as well.'

The aging process would slow down if one's Magic stat was high, and if one was at a certain level, they'd no longer age.

Kim Hyun-Sung, Rafael, Jung Ha-Yan, Cha Hee-Ra, Lee Ji-Hye, and I wouldn't age, but it wasn't the same for others, especially for Park Deok-Gu. I had never really thought about it until I saw Father Basel's holy power decreasing as he aged.

'He was such an energetic man. I still remember him raging and yelling while swinging his mace. Right now… I don't even know if he can still carry a mace anymore.'

"I'm sorry I haven't been able to visit you, Father Basel," I said.

“I understand what you’re going through, Father Lee Ki-Young. I’m a bit sad, but you’re using your powers for Goddess Benigoa in the loneliest and toughest way possible. In addition, what you’ve been doing is supposed to be the Order’s job. I actually feel really bad because it feels like we’ve put that burden on you,” Father Basel said.

“If it wasn’t for the Order—”

“I appreciate your words, Father Lee Ki-Young,” Father Basel interrupted me.

“That’s not true, Father Basel. How could I ignore the things that are going on within the Order? The followers’ prayers and beliefs are part of the reason why the continent is in its current state, but your wonderful leadership has contributed a lot to it as well,” I complimented him.

“*Hahaha.*” Father Basel laughed.

He was still weak to flattery.

“By the way, regarding the prayer service…” Father Basel said.

“I’m sorry,” I apologized.

“You don’t have to apologize for it, Father Lee Ki-Young. Every single devotee throughout the continent has been waiting for it as well, so it’s fine. I was actually surprised by your decision. If you had notified me in advance… I would have made sure that there aren’t going to be any issues with the preparations…” Father Basel said.

“I’m sorry for notifying you like this,” I said.

‘Damn it. I knew this was going to happen. What would that make him look like?’

If Grandpa Basel’s power was weakening in the Order, then he’d be more worried about this incident. It was more like a small event than an incident, but ordinary people were very sensitive to incidents like this. The prayer service was announced through Rafael’s personal account rather than through official channels. Wouldn’t the people find that suspicious?

‘The answer is pretty obvious.’

It was highly likely that there were rumors about how Father Basel and I were splitting up and about how I was no longer supporting Father Basel. I was sure there were other bad rumors as well.

This small event had the worst timing ever, as those guys with wings had just started showing themselves. It was one of the reasons why we were trying to convince the public that Father Basel and I were still together.

I needed to let the followers of the Vatican know that I still supported Father Basel, as small moves like those would be pretty helpful in delicate situations like this.

Father Basel and I talked about many useless topics, and I started noticing familiar faces nearby.

The majority of them were in the same faction as Father Basel, such as Sister Jayna and Sister Helena. Of course, I noticed other people as well. They gathered and started catching up before the abrupt, large-scale prayer service.

This was supposed to be a prayer service, but the key members of the Vatican were all here, so it was like we were at a party.

'The atmosphere isn't that friendly, though.'

It was different, but I felt like I was at a social event with nobles.

They were in their own cliques and were whispering with each other while being wary of each other.

I had never really noticed that until now, as I had never really been looking for it. Some looked at me anxiously, while others cast wary gazes at Father Basel. What caught my attention was a cardinal walking toward us.

"Father Lee Ki-Young," Yohan greeted.

"Father Yohan," I greeted back.

"You were here too, Father Basel," Yohan said.

"Welcome, Father Yohan," Father Basel greeted.

“Thank you for welcoming me, Father Basel. And… Father Lee Ki-Young. I’m looking forward to today’s prayer service,” Yohan said.

“It won’t be any different from the usual prayer service,” I told Yohan.

“But you’re leading it this time. I’m sure you think that it’s the same old prayer service, but the followers of the continent definitely don’t think that way. I want you to know that I have high expectations,” Yohan said.

“I’m not sure if my prayers will be enough…” I commented.

“The Son of Goddess Benigoa himself is leading the prayer, so—*Ah!* I almost forgot. I’d like to introduce you to someone…” Yohan said.

“*Huh?*”

“Come,” Yohan said.

“Okay.”

An unfamiliar figure appeared behind Father Yohan.

‘This bastard… ‘

“You may call him Simon,” Yohan informed me.

“He’s a Templar.” I pointed out.

“Do you know him?” Yohan asked.

“It’s my first time seeing Mr. Simon… but I’ve met another Templar. I simply assumed that he’s a Templar because he exudes a similar energy to the Templar I met,” I replied.

“I’d expect nothing less from you. *Haha*,” Yohan said, laughing.

‘There is something I want to discuss with him, though.’

I was curious about what the other Templars were like.

Simon's expression seemed perpetually cold. He had short black hair, and his height was similar to Kim Hyun-Sung. What stood out the most were his purple eyes, which gave me the feeling that he'd be more rational than emotional, especially when compared to Gen.

If anything, I felt like he was similar to us. By us, I meant people like Lee Ji-Hye, Jin Cheong, and me. Obviously, I couldn't say anything for sure, and this was just my first impression of him.

Ah, perhaps I felt that way because his Intelligence was pretty high. I also noticed his title, which was "Calculative Monk." Of course, I didn't feel any hostility from him. I assumed his goal was to leave a good impression on me, so it wouldn't hurt for me to leave a good impression on him, either…

"I apologize. I was in the middle of an important conversation with Father Basel… Would it be okay if I visit you later?" I asked.

Yohan was being too obvious, so I wanted to avoid talking to him.

"*Ah…"* Yohan frowned. He was trying not to show it, but I could tell that he was agitated.

"I know Goddess Benigoa has bestowed new blessings on some people," I mentioned.

"*Ah*, that's right, Father Lee Ki-Young. Just like Gen, Simon has also been bestowed… wings from Goddess Benigoa…" Yohan answered.

"I'd like to have a discussion about that later, but…" I trailed off and glanced at Father Basel. "It's been a while since I met Father Basel, so I would like to spend more time with him."

"I'm sorry, Father Lee Ki-Young… It seems like… I've interrupted your conversation," Yohan apologized.

"It's fine. No one would dare to blame you for anything, as you have such a high position within the Order. I simply have things regarding the prayer service that I need to discuss with him… Anyway, I hope you understand," I said.

My words sounded rude, but Yohan looked pretty happy when I patted his left shoulder in the warmest way possible. As expected, he looked happy. He nodded and

expressed as much respect as possible before retreating.

Meanwhile, Simon and I made eye contact, so I smiled at him.

Father Basel looked more ashamed than grateful.

“Father Basel,” I said.

“Father Lee Ki-Young.”

“I hope you keep in mind that I’m always on your side,” I told him.

“*Ahem…*”

When I signaled that we ought to start moving, Father Basel started walking away.

I had to change clothes, so we had to start moving.

“I heard the situation within the Order has changed,” I said.

“That’s right. Goddess Benigoa has bestowed blessings upon the Templars. It’s a huge blessing for the Order,” Father Basel said.

“Looks like the Templars will be more closely involved with the Vatican and I’m sure some of the followers want that as well. Did the Templars… decide to support Father Yohan?” I asked.

“They’re even talking about the next Pope,” Father Basel replied.

“…”

“Father Lee Ki-Young. It seems like Goddess Benigoa has no use for me anymore,” Father Basel added.

“The Templars have indeed received Goddess Benigoa’s blessing, but the fact that they aren’t supporting you does not mean that Goddess Benigoa is no longer watching over you. She always loves and supports all of her followers.

“I’m sure she’s always watching over you as well,” I replied.

'Why are you giving up already, man? We still have many things to do.'

"I'm not saying this just to make you feel better, Father Basel," I told him.

I decided to observe his reaction for now, as there were nearby priests in their formal outfits. Well, perhaps their presence didn't really matter because they seemed to be on the same side as Father Basel. Of course, I didn't care even if they spread rumors. In fact, I actually wanted them to do that.

I was just sad that I couldn't see Father Basel's face because he was waiting for me behind the white curtain.

"Perhaps…" I trailed off.

"…"

"Perhaps the Templars had stolen her powers, which meant their blessing wasn't actually bestowed upon them," I muttered.

Crash!

"*Ah*! I-I'm sorry," someone said. However, the voice didn't belong to Father Basel. It was the voice of a follower who had accidentally dropped a glass plate containing my accessories.

"I'm sorry, Father Lee Ki-Young. W-What should I—"

It seemed that my remark was really shocking.

The follower was sweeping their gaze frantically across the ground, searching for the accessories mixed with glass fragments, but what caught my attention was their confused expression.

They probably felt like they had heard something they weren't supposed to hear. I felt bad for them when I saw their trembling hands. I was sure they weren't acting that way because they had inadvertently dropped my accessories.

"It's fine. I think it's best if I walk out there with a simpler look today," I told them.

There was no need to look fancy every time.

I got rid of the useless accessories, and I saw myself wearing just a white priest outfit.

I still had an ancestry, which was a lone necklace. The fabric was woven in a meticulous way that made it appear pristine and holy, so I felt like it was enough for me.

In addition, I was sure everyone would be more focused on my wings rather than on my outfit, so my getup wouldn't really matter.

In fact, I was convinced that I looked even holier in this simple and humble outfit. I also thought this was a great decision, considering the ongoing situation.

Once I had changed into my clothes for the prayer service, I parted the curtain and saw Father Basel's distorted face. His face was so distorted that he looked like a demon.

'He's angry.'

"Is that true… Father Lee Ki-Young?" Father Basel asked. He looked like he was going to grab his mace and smash Father Yohan's head open with it. "Are you saying that those incompetent fools… stole Goddess Benigoa's powers…?!"

CHAPTER 915
SERA (15)

'Come to think of it, this old man is famous for having a bad personality.'

He was like a kind old man these days, but at one point, Father Basel was famous for his fiery temper. When he was still a cardinal, he wielded his mace and personally smashed in the heads of undead creatures.

Many people were still wary of him even after he became the Pope. Whenever Father Basel was mentioned, I'd always imagine an old man shouting at someone to bring his mace to him. His spit would go everywhere as he shouted, and his eyes would become bloodshot, which reminded me of Jung Ha-Yan whenever she was angry.

"Are you telling the truth?" Father Basel asked. Had this old man been pretending as if he were senile all this while? I could see his veins bulging on his hands. He was still pretty healthy. It seemed that my worries were unfounded.

"Bring my mace right now…" Father Basel ordered.

'Don't just start looking for your mace.'

"It hasn't been confirmed yet, Father Basel. It was simply an assumption," I told him.

"Goddess Benigoa! What did She say?" Father Basel asked.

"Actually… it's been a while since I heard Her voice," I replied.

'The situation is pretty serious. You understand that, right?'

"H-How… could this… happen…" Father Basel mumbled.

I couldn't help but become careful when I saw his trembling lips.

"Of course, I can feel her beside me… but I had this strange dream recently… Of course, I wish it was nothing, but considering our current situation…" I paused.

“Father Lee Ki-Young, can you tell me more… about that dream?” Father Basel asked.

I knew he’d ask that question.

I decided to be hesitant for a bit before telling him my dream.

I told him the same thing I told Gen, but I made it sound more realistic.

I described the way Benigoa was trapped underground, and I described the room she was in. It was important to stimulate his imagination by avoiding detailed descriptions but telling him how horrible and cursed the scene was at the same time.

“It was such a horrible sight that I don’t dare talk about it,” I told him.

The demons were greedily devouring the holy blood of the goddess.

The scene was so horrible that recounting it made me cry.

“She kept asking me for help,” I said.

I made it sound realistic.

Father Basel and the followers helping me get dressed were crying as well. Some were trembling in fear, and it was understandable because how many followers could stay calm when the goddess they were serving was in such a predicament?

“The place was like hell. I wish what I saw was a lie… but thinking that Goddess Benigoa is in pain even now…” I paused.

“Goddess Benigoa… *Ahh*… Goddess Benigoa…” Father Basel cried out.

“*Heuk… heuuk…*”

“*Heuk…* Goddess Benigoa…”

Obviously, Father Basel and the followers didn’t misinterpret what I said.

I was sure they thought that the Templars were the demons.

“W-We must! Capture those Templars and hand them over to the Heretic Inquisitors!

Even now, Goddess Benigoa is screaming out for help. They're the most evil bastards in the world… H-How dare they!" Father Basel shouted.

'It would be nice if it were that easy.'

Still, I was glad that Father Basel was on my side. I knew he was on my side as soon as I met Father Yohan, but his reaction was like a confirmation that we were indeed on the same side.

"I believe my dreams are connected to the anomalies that have been occurring recently. I'm talking about the monsters that can wield holy power, Father Basel," I told him.

"R-Right. I thought that was strange as well," Father Basel said.

"Mr. Rafael agrees, but we can't say for sure yet. If Goddess Benigoa ends up in trouble because we moved too hastily…" I paused.

"Goodness…" Father Basel commented.

"I don't think I'll be able to forgive myself until the day I die," I added.

"R-Right, you're right. It's not too late to surrender myself to anger once we've handled everything," Father Basel said.

There was one more thing I needed to confirm here.

"Do you know how the Templars are nominated?" I asked.

Father Basel shook his head.

"They're a group that works separately from the Vatican, Father Lee Ki-Young. I tried to unify our groups together, but…" Father Basel paused.

'I'm sure it was hard.'

It wasn't really strange, and the Templar's influence was pretty strong, as they were the strongest armed force in the Order.

This was a world of magic and strange phenomena. A politician, a noble, or even a

king would die upon getting hit by a powerful spell.

Father Basel had no choice but to be nice and respect the group. After all, they were responsible for protecting the high-ranking members of the Vatican.

It was my first time hearing this, but Father Basel definitely wanted to reform the Templars. The result wasn't great, but the fact that Father Basel had managed to establish an information network there was awesome.

"I see," I said.

"If I knew this was going to happen…" Father Basel trailed off.

"It's not your fault, Father Basel," I told him.

"…"

"The Templars have been protecting the Vatican and the cardinals up for the longest time now. I'm sure questioning their legitimacy is the same thing as questioning the Order, and…" I paused.

"…"

"They have been by Goddess Benigoa's side for a very long time. I don't know what made them change, but—"

"I understand that you have a kind heart, but the reason behind their actions isn't that important anymore. It's possible that they have been possessed by demons, or they may have fallen into temptation.

"However, the reason wouldn't justify their actions. They have sinned, so they must be punished for it. How can I forgive them? I can't forgive them for what they've done this time… I'm going to throw them into the brimstone of hell," Father Basel interrupted me.

'I understand your feelings that way, but you can't just attack them. There are still many things we need to know and hear.'

More importantly, I wanted to see how they'd react once I started being hostile toward them.

If they were still an ordinary armed force, I could probably break through to them, but they were working with Father Yohan, so I was sure that their political influence was pretty strong.

Perhaps this was a checkmate for Father Basel…

“There’s an order for everything. If we want the believers to believe that they must be punished, then we need convincing enough evidence, I told him.

The first step was bringing them down.

“Right… you’re right…” Father Basel said.

“It hasn’t been that long since that big fight. I don’t want the believers to be nervous,” I said.

Information was necessary as well.

‘I need to know how the Mole Saint’s Cozy Sanctuary works.’

I also needed to help Father Basel grow in power so that they could accept his *slightly* far-fetched arguments.

“Father Lee Ki-Young…” Father Basel said.

“…”

I put my sad face on and wiped away my tears.

“Father Lee Ki-Young…” Father Basel repeated.

However, I couldn’t stop crying. It looked like someone had turned on the faucet to my holy tears.

‘Yeah, my tears are holy tears.’

The followers were quiet as they stared at the Saint of Light.

The Saint of Light had merely been acting tough all this while, and the followers learned that fact when they witnessed his weak side.

Father Basel looked sad as he stared at me. The prayer service would start soon, and he watched as I became an emotional wreck. His eyes were filled with sympathy toward me, as he knew that I was carrying a huge burden on my shoulders.

It was a gaze that people wouldn't usually cast on me.

"Father Lee Ki-Young… regarding the prayer service that's taking place today…"

"I appreciate your concern, but I'm fine. All I can do right now is pray for her safety," I told one of the followers.

'My prayer service has to continue… '

"I may be crossing the line here, but how about we delay the prayer service a bit?"

'Why? Does it look like I'm unable to control my emotions right now? Or… do I look like a mess because I cried too much?'

They could be trying to stop me because they were afraid that I was going to put the blame on them. After all, I wasn't wearing the majority of my accessories, and I looked really pathetic. Obviously, I knew they weren't really thinking that way, but…

'They don't know anything.'

This kind of look was more effective. It was better to go out there looking like this. I had to look as weak and as pitiful as possible. I had to look like I could break even at the lightest touch. Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to touch the people's hearts.

It was the same when the continent was under a huge threat. I had to look more human than anyone else. Of course, the light within me couldn't look human, but that gap would touch the people's hearts.

That was my identity, after all.

"It's fine," I told them.

The followers turned to Father Basel, looking like they wanted to tell Father Basel to ask me to stop.

"Father Basel…"

“Let’s do what Father Lee Ki-Young wants. Who could stop him? Let’s all pray for Goddess Benigoa,” Father Basel said, shaking his head. He was telling them that I couldn’t be stopped.

‘I said I’m fine, so why are they making a big deal out of it? And we can’t delay it either.’

Soon, I heard the loud noise of a pipe organ.

The noise was so loud that the entire Vatican seemed to tremble beneath it.

Since it was an official prayer service, they used the biggest pipe organ.

Eventually, I heard the choir, and I was sure the people who had come here to attend the service were finally entering the hall. The followers supporting the weak Saint of Light cast worried gazes at me, but I nodded at them, signaling that I was okay.

However, I didn’t even bother wiping away my tears.

‘Kim Hyun-Sung, you better not be here. I told him not to come here.’

If he had a conscience, he’d stay in the Republic. I told Jin Cheong to keep him there so I was sure that they were having an awkward time together.

Hee-Ra noona said that she was coming, while the majority of the Blue Guild members were probably here.

While thinking about many useless things, I started walking away. Light poured down into the cathedral through the stained glass and holy light poured down through the perforated ceiling.

“Father Lee Ki-Young…!”

“*Ahh…* Son of Light…!”

The followers standing in the hallway proceeded with the prayer service; they didn’t say much, as they were too shocked to witness my appearance. When I spread my wings, they looked down as if they were in a daze.

“Goddess Benigoa’s blessing will be with you,” I said.

“Thank you, Son of Light…”

I also saw Rafael, who had decided to attend the prayer service.

“Hyung… are you okay?” Rafael asked.

He extended his hand out hesitantly to try and comfort me…

Slap!

‘You bastard. How dare you.’

“Hyung?”

“I’ll head up first, Mr. Rafael,” I told him.

‘You need to be punished for what you did.’

When I walked up to my spot, I noticed the crying followers.

‘I knew this was going to work.’

They didn’t bother wiping their tears and simply stared at me dumbfoundedly. When I spread my wings wide, they exclaimed and looked away. They probably thought that looking directly at my wings was disrespectful.

‘My wings do look pretty nice. Particles of light keep falling down from it.’

Even I thought that my wings looked pretty.

‘Maybe I should flap them again.’

This was seriously amazing.

I was crying as well.

My tears were sincere and beautiful, looking like they contained the pain and innocence of the entire continent.

CHAPTER 916
SERA (16)

"How long has it been?"

"*Ah!* Lady Marilyn! You're here. How have you been doing?" I[1] asked.

"I've been doing fine as usual. Other than attending the cabinet meetings, I've been spending most of my time at Castlerock. I'm busier than I expected, so I don't even have time to do my hobbies," Marilyn answered.

"*Ah*… how's your father doing?" I asked.

"He's been the same. He's been struggling a bit after retirement, but he found a new hobby recently… How have you been doing, Lady Violet?" Marilyn asked.

"…"

"…"

I didn't really want to answer that kind of question.

"I haven't been doing much. I lost my position as a senator… and have been living with my parents while walking on eggshells around them. Father said he'd get a spot in the Continental Protection Management Committee, but I ruined my interview…

"I'm embarrassed to say this, but I guess I'm still not ready," I answered.

"*Ah…* I'm sorry," Marilyn said.

"It's fine. It's nothing you need to apologize for. It's all because I'm not good enough… Compared to me, I think you're really amazing, Lady Marilyn. Whenever I meet with my friends, they always talk about you," I told her.

"What? But I'm not all that amazing…" Marilyn muttered.

“You’re really amazing. You contributed a lot to the development of the Democratic Country as a senator, and you’re handling many different things, too.

“I heard Castlerock is improving daily. I’m sure it’s difficult… considering it’s right next to the Republic. Anyway, your work really is admirable,” I said.

I wasn’t lying.

When Senator Marilyn was just the daughter of Count Castlerock, she wasn’t really that popular, but when the Empire became a Democratic Country, she became a hot topic among the daughters of nobles.

She didn’t really attend the social gatherings that I made sure to attend each time, but the people there would always be talking about her.

‘I thought she would be the same even after time passed.’

She wasn’t really the type to get involved with people back then.

Castlerock was far from the Capital.

Marilyn was really bubbly, but there was something strange about her, so none of the daughters wanted to be friends with her. If it weren’t for Count Castlerock’s influence on the Empire, she wouldn’t get invited to anything.

‘Actually, she was excluded from a few events.’

I wasn’t openly ignoring Lady Marilyn, but I’d spend time with the ladies I usually spent some time with…

‘There was nothing I could do.’

Marilyn would smile while looking at a strange picture by herself alone, and she’d sometimes make strange noises by herself. She *really* was different from the other noble ladies.

If it weren’t for my mother, I wouldn’t spend time with Marilyn as well.

Thanks to the time that I had no choice but to spend with her, I got an understanding of the kind of person Marilyn was, and we became close to each other, too.

However, I could still remember being uncomfortable during the adjustment period.

“Still, I get to come to a place like this thanks to you,” I said.

“I was lucky. Senator Caitlyn owed me a favor, so I was lucky enough to get us good seats. I was thinking about who I should come with… and I recalled you saying you never attended a prayer service before,” Marilyn explained.

“Y-You remembered?” I asked.

“Of course. You’re… my friend,” Marilyn said.

“Lady Marilyn… is it… really okay for someone like me to be here?” I asked.

I glanced to the side.

‘It’s Miss Jung Ha-Yan.’

The person sitting next to her had to be Miss Han Sora.

When I turned to the right, I saw Miss Oscar, the leader of the Sacred Democratic Country.

“Miss Oscar,” Marilyn greeted.

“Senator Marilyn. We meet again. I don’t think I’ve seen her before…” Oscar pointed out.

“M-My name’s Violet. It’s an honor to meet you,” I greeted.

“She’s my friend,” Marilyn said.

“I see. It’s nice to meet you,” Oscar greeted me and grabbed my hand. We proceeded to shake hands and talk a bit. Our conversation didn’t last that long, but my heart was already pounding wildly against my chest.

After all, the leaders of the Sacred Democratic Country were basically here.

There were quite a few members from the Blue Guild as well including Miss Jung Ha-Yan and Miss Han Sora.

However, I didn't see any of their rookies.

Perhaps they were sitting in the second or third row. I saw those with important positions, those with social influence, those esteemed by others, and war heroes who were active in the war.

Anyone could tell that I didn't belong here.

The conversations I heard before the prayer service started were pretty serious.

They were discussing the continent's political situation or the usage of an unimaginable amount of gold. If this were some sort of social gathering, I would get up and greet them, but the place didn't give off that kind of atmosphere.

'Quiet.'

It was definitely different from a social gathering.

They seemed really cautious about even asking about each other's well-being.

The place was also pretty quiet, overall. A long time ago, there was a similar meeting among nobles, but that meeting couldn't compare to this gathering.

I could tell how much they respected this prayer service.

"You don't need to be so nervous, Lady Violet," Marilyn said.

"*Ah…* okay," I said.

"There's no special etiquette or rules you need to follow," Marilyn added.

"But…"

"I'm sure everyone is just being cautious. They've been waiting for this prayer service more than anyone…" Marilyn said.

"*Ah*… I see."

"Come to think of it, is this your first time seeing Father Lee Ki-Young in person?" Marilyn asked.

“Yes…” I replied.

‘I never had the chance to meet him.’

I had seen him from far away, and I was about to see him up close for the first time.

I had seen pictures, videos, recorded prayer service videos, and interviews on Benigoa Net. I watched his occasional media appearances, too, but this was my first time seeing him in person.

We didn’t really have much of a connection… and honestly, I had never really been able to attend the prayer services because I was too busy with work. I guess it could be said that I was really courageous to come here.

“Now that I think about it… you’ve met with Father Lee Ki-Young privately before, right?” I asked.

“Yes, but I haven’t been able to meet him at all recently. I can only talk to him from time to time. Even though it’s just once a month, I’m really grateful for the fact that he still replies to me,” Marilyn answered.

“*Ah…* w-what’s he like?” I asked.

“Imagine it, and he’s exactly like that,” Marilyn replied.

‘Exactly as I imagine… ‘

Of course, I didn’t really have to think too much about it, as I’d be seeing him soon.

Soon, the sound of the giant pipe organ filled the room.

The loud sound comforted everyone rather than making them think that it was too loud.

Light poured down from the ceiling, and the choir sang.

The murmurs vanished as well.

Some grabbed the rosario hanging from their neck, while some prayed quietly with their heads down.

Senator Marilyn was right. Everyone was paying their respect in their own ways.

My heart pounded violently against my chest, and I felt like I was in heaven.

The priests sent wave after wave of holy light, which filled the room in a beautiful way.

Also…

"*Ah!*"

"…"

"*Heup!*" I shouted unknowingly, as what I saw made me hold my breath.

I finally realized why they were still playing the organ and why the choir was still singing.

Someone was bound to exclaim, and they were being considerate of the followers who might make a mistake. The people who were used to attending these prayer services were already holding their breaths.

Senator Marilyn, Miss Oscar, and Miss Jung Ha-Yan stared agape…

"*Ah… ahh…*"

"O God…"

"Son of Light…"

They stared agape at the Son of Light, the God of Sacrifice and Revival, the symbol of Goddess Benigoa, and the pride of the continent. They stared agape at him while muttering words that I couldn't quite understand.

He was wearing a simple white priest uniform, but he looked holier than anyone here. His outfit looked like it was woven to resemble heaven, and he was wearing a necklace on top of it.

His clothes billowed out around him as he walked, and I felt like I could see his raw, naked body through the thin fabric of his uniform.

'I-I can't have these outrageous thoughts…!'

He was walking with bare hands and bare feet for the prayer.

The room was filled with music, but it felt like I could hear him stomping on the ground. The sound of his clothes rubbing against each other pervaded my head. There was no way I could hear something like that, but it was like my mind was unwittingly transfixed on those noises.

"O God…"

Light fell upon everyone, and Father Lee Ki-Young's wings of light spread wide.

Light spread from the wings that looked more beautiful than anything else. The light scattered across the wings and floated briefly before disappearing. I wanted to stretch out my hand to grab those particles of light, but I froze upon seeing the saint's tearful face.

"*Ah…*"

"Son of Light…"

I felt like I had become a sinner.

Was the Saint of Light before me carrying my sins?

Was he carrying all the sins throughout the continent by himself? I didn't know what was going on, but I was crying before I even realized it. The others were in the same condition as me. They were staring at him in disbelief while crying.

He was the saint who had decided to return to the continent because he loved it more than anyone else. He hadn't been able to leave this place, as he cared about it more than anyone else.

How could an ordinary person like me understand his deep intentions? How could I understand the meaning of those tears? Many different ideas popped up in my head, but in the end, I ceased all thoughts.

The prayer continued amidst the deafening silence.

Once the prayer was recited, he sprinkled holy power and put his hands together.

The denizens of the Democratic Country were familiar with this procedure, and it looked kind of different, even though it was the same exact procedure that other priests would do for the prayer service.

It was more like he himself was a different being.

The way he prayed to Goddess Benigoa with bare hands and feet…

"*Ahh…*"

It was like I was watching a play. It was too beautiful to be called "natural."

The Gray Warrior walked up to him quietly and placed a transparent fabric on top of Father Lee Ki-Young's head.

The priests moved to their designated spots and proceeded with the ceremony.

The choir's singing got even louder as light fell from the sky once again.

Father Lee Ki-Young raised his hand, and his sleeves fell, revealing his thin arm to everyone. Despite that, the ceremony continued. He knelt down before Goddess Benigoa's statue and offered his holy power to her.

"I'll give my all to you, Goddess Benigoa," he said.

A massive light burst out of him and took to the sky, creating a really unrealistic sight.

'I must be in heaven right now.'

The column of light lasted only for a moment, but I couldn't help but think that way upon seeing it.

"S-Sora. Y-You got all that, right?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"Yes, of course," Han Sora replied.

"Y-You have to keep recording," Jung Ha-Yan instructed.

“Senator Marilyn,” I said.

“…”

“Are you okay, Senator Marilyn?” I asked

“Yes,” Marilyn replied.

It was like everyone was under a spell.

Soon, the Saint of Light’s lively and clear voice filled my ears.

“This is the word of Goddess Benigoa.”

I saw him reciting the sacred verses of democracy.

“I say this to everyone I love,” Father Lee Ki-Young added.

It was like his voice was massaging my brain.

“Son of Light.”

“Son of Light…”

BOOM!

And that was when I heard a deafening explosion.

A thick fog enveloped everyone, and when it receded, I saw monsters with holy wings.

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1. Violet’s POV ☜

CHAPTER 917
SERA (17)

"*Aaaahhh!*"

"W-What the…"

Booooooooooooom!

"Lady Violet!" Marilyn shouted.

"Lady Marilyn?" I[1] questioned.

"Miss Jung Ha-Yan! Miss Jung Ha-Yan!"

"*Huh?* W-What about oppa… Is he okay?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

Kabooooooooooooom!

"We need to leave for now," Han Sora urged.

"I-I-Is he okay?!" Marilyn yelled.

"Prepare for battle! Prepare for battle!"

"Oppa! Oppa!"

"It's the Holy Knights! I-I'll join the… No, come this way, Miss Jung Ha-Yan," Marilyn said.

"O-Oppa!" Jung Ha-Yan shouted.

"This way, Miss Jung Ha-Yan!" Han Sora yelled.

"L-Let go of me! Let go!" Jung Ha-Yan shouted.

“Damn it! Jung Ha-Yan! Hurry up and come this way!” Marilyn yelled.

“*Ahh!*”

“Listen to me!” Marilyn urged.

“Wait… get away…!”

A massive light made out of holy power engulfed us.

Wooooooooo!

The rumbling noise sounded bad to me.

‘Huh? Am I going to die?’

Many different thoughts popped up into my head.

My feet—no, my body wouldn’t move. It was like they were frozen.

I looked to the side and saw Marilyn shouting at me, “What are you doing, Lady Violet?!”

“Stand behind me!” Marilyn instructed.

Boooooooooooom!

A deafening explosion echoed, and I saw someone’s massive back profile.

“*Uh…*”

“Ha-Yan noonim!” Park Deok-Gu shouted.

“O-Oppa… Oppa is!” Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

“I know! Prepare for battle! Prepare for battle!!! Get into formation! Hurry! Hey! Shiro! Alps! Come this way!” Park Deok-Gu ordered.

“*Woof! Woof!*”

“O-Okay! Belier! Come with me,” Alps instructed.

“Yes, ma’am!” Belier answered.

“We’ll split into groups. Ahn Ki-Mo, Sun Hee-Young, Han Sora, Hwang Jung-Yeon, Belier, Alps, and Elena will protect and evacuate the people,” Jo Hye-Jin instructed.

“Y-Yes, ma’am!”

“Kim Ye-Ri, Park Deok-Gu, Kim Chang-Ryeol, and Yoo Ah-Young will come with me. Rescuing the sub guild master is our top priority. The enemies are believed to be monsters capable of wielding holy power.

“Miss Hwang Jung-Yeon will support using her spells, and Mr. Park Deok-Gi will tank as usual—”

“So you’re telling me to be a meat shield?” Park Deok-Gu interrupted.

“I’m sorry for making an unreasonable request,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

“It’s fine. It’s my job,” Park Deok-Gu replied.

“He’s right,” Kim Ye-Ri chimed in.

“Let’s go,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

“O-Okay!”

‘It’s the members of the Blue Guild.’

I was definitely staring at the members of the Blue Guild, and I saw them move busily after assessing the situation in the proverbial blink of an eye.

The turn of events was so sudden that I had no idea what was going on, but it seemed like the chaotic situation was calming down. I could no longer hear screams and panicking voices.

I looked around and saw people casting their spells or using their holy power. They secured an escape route to ensure that the people could escape starting from the back while protecting the people waiting for their turn to evacuate.

A few priests and adventurers were calming down the nervous people.

'Are we really safe now, though? W-we should be safe. We're in the Vatican, after all.'

The Sacred Democratic Country had its own independent armed forces.

The Sacred Democratic Country was as strong as the major guilds throughout the continent, and they had been fighting against demons and heretics for centuries. They were the ones who had raised up their holy swords and took the lead on the continent's prophesied day of destruction.

I had never heard of monsters invading the Vatican, but they could definitely handle this.

The top-ranking members of the Blue Guild and powerful adventurers were here as well, so I was sure that we would be safe.

However, I still couldn't stop myself from trembling in fear.

"We'll be safe, Lady Violet," Marilyn reassured.

I calmed down upon hearing her voice.

"A-Are you okay, Lady Marilyn?" I asked.

"I'm used to it," Marilyn replied.

"What?"

Marilyn nodded at my question, and I was confused for a moment, but I eventually understood why she said that.

'Lady Marilyn… is from Castlerock.'

Castlerock was practically right in front of the Republic. It was so close to the border that I was sure there was constant conflict. Moreover, Castlerock often experienced monster waves, which was the reason why Castlerock was categorized as a dangerous place.

Lady Marilyn had grown up in such an environment, so I was sure she had

experienced this kind of situation many times in the past.

She was born to a military family, so she had to have received swords and magic training. Her confidence was what made her the person she was today, and she was completely different from me, who knew nothing but to cower in fear.

“The adventurers and the Holy Knights will take care of this, and we have Miss Oscar with us,” Marilyn reassured.

“I see…” I said.

“They’re securing an escape route from the back, although it might take some time…” Marilyn informed me.

“R-Right?” I stuttered.

“We also have the Blue Guild here. We’ll be fine… but I’m not sure if Father Lee Ki-Young is safe…” Marilyn mumbled.

“*Ah!* N-Now that I think about it…”

“Mr. Rafael is with him… but I don’t think we’re dealing with ordinary monsters here. I’ve never heard of monsters wielding holy power…” Marilyn said.

“Y-You haven’t?” I asked.

“At least not that I know of or seen. Adventurers say that dungeons have unique creatures, but I think this is different from that… The fact that they have those wings and the fact that they even entered the Vatican.

“I think they have another goal…” Marilyn deduced replied.

“What if…”

“Yes, I think their target is Father Lee Ki-Young. I’m not sure if they came here because his holy power attracted them, but I wouldn’t be surprised if it turns out that someone has orchestrated all this. They must’ve taken this prayer service into account because their timing was perfect,” Marilyn explained.

“T-Then the incident back then…”

“I don’t want to overinterpret and say it’s going to be the same as the continent’s day of destruction…” Marilyn trailed off.

“D-Do you think that demons are behind this?” I asked.

Demons capable of wielding holy power… It sounded more unrealistic than monsters capable of wielding holy power, but the two ideas were both unrealistic to begin with. I was embarrassed because I felt like I had asked a stupid question, but Marilyn nodded.

“Things unknown to us often happen throughout the continent. To make matters worse, I don’t think holy power… is going to work on those monsters,” Marilyn said.

“What?”

It seemed that Marilyn was right, as I soon heard screams everywhere.

“Holy power isn’t working on those monsters! The priests should retreat.”

“Protection-type spells are useless.”

I was worried about the people at the front line.

I couldn’t help but admire the Blue Guild as they rushed to the front that was filled with a hostile light and raised their shields to the sky.

They faced the hostile light and opened up a path for the people. Unfortunately, their transparent shield was slowly crumbled in the face of the hostile light.

‘Is it okay to enter the light that’s destroying their shields?’

Wooooooo!

“You bastards!”

A cracking noise echoed as a giant arm shattered the shield.

“O-Oppa!”

Miss Jung Ha-Yan jumped into the light.

When the monster with wings was about to crush her…

“You dirty bastard!”

A massive purple arm shoved the monster away.

“*Huh?*”

“Black magic?” I questioned out loud.

Then, an ominous black wave of black mana condensed, restoring the shields that were about to be destroyed. The ominous energy felt strange to me, and I could feel it slowly filling up the hall.

Rumble!

“S-Sora? I told you not to go!” Jung Ha-Yan shouted.

I saw Miss Han Sora sporting black wings in midair.

‘What the hell is going on?’

The energy was so ominous that I started feeling nervous at the sight of it. In addition to the terrified cries of the people, the situation became even more tense when pitch-black monsters rose up with their horrifying maws wide open.

They made screeching noises as they charged at the winged monsters.

Wooooooo.

What was I watching right now? Just a few moments ago, I thought I was in heaven, but now, I felt like I was in hell.

The monster that jumped up next to me was swallowed by a giant mouth that appeared from underground. The monster managed to escape the colossal mouth, but dozens of pitch-black spears were waiting for it outside.

“I told you to come this way! I’m sure the sub guild master is safe since he’s with Rafael,” Han Sora said.

“S-Sora…” Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

“Don’t try to do anything. Right now, you…”

The pitch-black spears killed one of the monsters, but it got up again.

To make things worse, it pulled out the spears with its own hands, and it was.

‘It’s recovering.’

A giant purple hand had crushed it, but the winged monster still managed to stand up despite being covered in blood. It was such a horrendous sight that I couldn’t question why Miss Han Sora was using black magic.

The sight around me was so unrealistic that I felt like I was dreaming.

“I’m… I’m sorry… I…” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“Don’t apologize. T-There’s nothing we can do right now. More importantly, come this way!” Han Sora urged.

“Okay…”

“Miss Han Sora, will you be okay?” Hwang Jung-Yeon asked.

“It can’t be helped, Jung-Yeon unni. Holy power and my magic are opposites… This is the best option,” Han Sora answered.

‘She must’ve been hiding it.’

“Why is Miss Jung Ha-Yan—”

“She’s going through some stuff. I’ll explain later,” Han Sora interrupted.

“I’m okay, but she can’t avoid punishment. You remember that reporting your condition is mandatory, right?” Hwang Jung-Yeon reminded her.

“Yes…” Han Sora answered.

“I think it’s best to remove Miss Jung Ha-Yan from the frontline. Please stand next to

Senator Marilyn. She'll escape with Senator Marilyn once we've secured an exit route," Hwang Jung-Yeon instructed.

I was standing with Miss Jung Ha-Yan.

I had no idea what was going on, but one thing I was sure of was that there was a problem with Miss Jung Ha-Yan right now. She was crying while being protected by a transparent shield.

When the light up ahead started to fade, she looked up and stared at the front line.

I was ignorant of what was going on, but I could tell that the situation was changing.

The hall was too bright for me to see anything earlier, but the spell that Han Sora had cast was making the holy power fade. The room soon became filled with an ominous color. I wasn't happy to see that, but it was better than those monsters.

The black and white energy collided as the pitch-black monsters and winged monsters duked it out. The shield protecting the people was becoming stronger and stronger while the winged monsters were falling to the ground one by one.

Wooooooooo!

Kyaaaah!

"Lady Violet! This way!" Marilyn urged.

"What?"

"Why are you just standing there? It's our turn," Marilyn said.

"*Ah*… o-okay!" I answered.

"Miss Jung Ha-Yan, go with them!" Hwang Jung-Yeon suggested.

"B-But…!" Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

"Forget it. Let's hurry and get out of here! Damn it! Belier!" Hwang Jung-Yeon shouted.

“Y-Yes?” Belier answered.

“Take Miss Jung Ha-Yan away…”

“Yes, ma’am! Come this way, ma’am! Everyone! Senator Marilyn! Miss Jung Ha-Yan! A-And… And! Anyway, come quickly!” Belier yelled.

“W-Wait… Oppa!” Jung Ha-Yan exclaimed.

“What?”

I turned and saw Father Lee Ki-Young in Mr. Rafael’s arms.

Father Lee Ki-Young was covered in blood.

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1. Violet’s POV ☜

CHAPTER 918
SERA (18)

“I think we’ve taken care of things here.”

“Persistent bastards.”

“I want the priest to take care of the wounded.”

“Hyung-nim, are you okay? Hyung-nim… open your eyes. Are you badly hurt somewhere?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

I could hear loud noises everywhere.

My eyes were closed, but I knew what was going on.

The priests were taking care of the wounded, the Holy Knights were preparing for the next attack, and I was sure a wall of Holy Knights had surrounded me. It sounded like Park Deok-Gu was next to me. It seemed that the Blue Guild still had their guards up since this happened inside the Vatican.

‘I’m sure they’re shocked.’

Of course, I could hear the people of the Vatican talking to each other.

They were discussing the identity and the goal of the enemies.

They had probably concluded that they were after me.

The commotion was making me feel happy. This was different from the monster that had appeared in the square and the unique monster that was discovered in the forest—this was different because this happened inside the Vatican.

To make things worse, it was after me, the Saint of Light, who had once laid down everything for the continent. It was a disaster that would shake the nation, let alone the high-ranking officials and the important figures of the continent.

“What the hell are the Holy Knights doing?!”

‘Father Basel is pretty good at yelling.’

“I can’t believe you call yourselves ‘Holy Knights’ without noticing those monsters invading the Vatican! You fools! You fools!” Father Basel roared.

“We apologize,” one of the knights said.

“Do you seriously think that a mere… apology will resolve this issue?! I really want to crush your skull with my mace right now, you idiots!” Father Basel shouted.

“We apologize,” one of the knights repeated.

‘He’s still got it.’

“But… Your Holiness, there’s something important we need to tell you,” a knight said.

“I don’t want to hear your excuses right now,” Father Basel said.

‘The commander is really having a tough time.’

“I’m not giving an excuse. It’s just… It’s just that we couldn’t find any traces of the enemies inside…” the commander said.

I thought this was a good time to get up.

Park Deok-Gu wouldn’t stop shaking my shoulders, and I was worried about Jo Hye-Jin, who was staring at me quietly. I also needed to rescue the commander, who could get executed for something he hadn’t done.

“*Hmm…”*

“Father Lee Ki-Young!” Father Basel called out.

“*Ah… mmm…”* I groaned.

“Father Lee Ki-Young! Are you okay?! Hey there! What are the priests doing?! Father Lee Ki-Young is…”

'The old man is going to run out of breath.'

"Sir, are you okay?" Jo Hye-Jin asked.

"Hyung-nim, are you awake? Hey, Holy Sword bro…"

"He's covered in blood, but thankfully, his wounds aren't deep…" Rafael told him.

"I don't know how to thank you," Park Deok-Gu said.

"I'm not the one who saved him. Thankfully, someone blocked the attack for him," Rafael told everyone.

The weak Saint of Light woke up and said, "*Ah…* thank you, Mr. Gen."

"Father Lee Ki-Young!" Father Basel called out.

"I'm fine, Father Basel. I'm fine. I only fainted. Thankfully, he saved me before the monster got close to me," I told him.

"I'm glad. I'm really grateful…" Father Basel mumbled.

"You don't need to be so worried, Father Basel," I said.

"How could I not be worried?" Father Basel questioned.

Father Basel's reaction was really amusing.

Before the prayer service, he thought of the Templars as demons, but he probably realized that something was off upon discovering that one of the Templars had saved my life.

For now, he seemed really grateful that I was safe. On the other hand, he was questioning whether Gen had ulterior motives or not, but instinctively, he was grateful to Gen for saving someone precious to him.

Everyone was looking at Gen, and I had to say something before Father Basel.

"Thank you again, Mr. Gen."

“I was simply doing what was right, Father Lee Ki-Young,” Gen said.

“Are you hurt anywhere?” I asked.

“I’m fine, but you…”

Of course, he wasn’t hurt.

I was sure he felt sore, but he didn’t suffer any serious injuries, so he’d soon recover.

“I don’t know how to thank you… I’ll be sure to visit you later to thank you properly,” I offered.

“You don’t need to…”

“No, I’ll make sure to visit you. The situation isn’t that great right now…” I said.

We couldn’t stay here and keep listening to me expressing my gratitude toward him. A serious incident had just occurred, and we needed to figure out how to handle all this.

Gen seemed to have realized that as well because he bowed quietly and disappeared into the crowd.

Father Basel helped me up, and the guild members cast worried gazes at me.

As for Jung Ha-Yan… she was probably somewhere else.

Elena and Sun Hee-Young examined me, and then they nodded to signal to everyone that I was fine. The new recruits looked so awkward as they stood there, not knowing what to do.

Meanwhile, Jo Hye-Jin was talking with the people of the Vatican.

“Well then… the Blue Guild will take care of the sub guild master,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

“Why don’t you stay here a little longer and observe his condition?”

The Blue Guild definitely wanted to bring me… to that damned room with no windows to ensure my safety. However, the Vatican didn’t want to send me away.

Actually, it was a matter of face. A strange incident had happened inside the Vatican, and if everyone heard that I immediately left the Vatican, the Vatican would look bad.

It was tantamount to saying that the Vatican wasn't a safe place. In addition, everyone might assume that this was a terrorist incident caused by the internal strife within the Vatican, which was the truth.

'It's not that I don't want to go back to that room… '

I needed to think about Father Basel's image. This wasn't his fault, after all.

"I'm fine, Miss Hye-Jin," I said.

"Sir, what if…"

'This isn't a safe place? That we need to be careful because we might get ambushed again?'

"It happened inside the Vatican. Also… it happened during the prayer service… I believe I'm somewhat responsible," I told her.

"But…"

"I believe the Vatican will take care of the things you're worried about. Father Basel, if you don't mind…" I trailed off.

"Let's do that. Provide a place for the members of the Blue Guild to stay!" Father Basel ordered.

This was what one would call an agreement.

I was glad Father Basel was easy to talk to.

Not only was the guild given permission to stay at the Vatican to protect me, but he had also given them a lot of authority that would allow them to carry out their missions with more flexibility.

The guild members basically had the same authority as ordinary Holy Knights, and it was an authority that would last until I left the Vatican. Of course, we wouldn't be able to enter every part of the Vatican, but we definitely had access to classified

information.

Kim Ye-Ri and Lee Chang-Ryeol could obtain a variety of information, and the energetic Father Basel could give us access to even more things. Obviously, there were people who disliked the idea, and one of them was Father Yohan standing in front of us…

"Your Holiness, that's…"

"What are you worried about, Father Yohan?" Father Basel questioned.

"I'm not worried about anything, but they're outsiders. I'm simply worried that something bad might happen if we're not careful," Father Yohan answered.

"Are you trying to say that we should send Father Lee Ki-Young and the Blue Guild away despite their conditions?! This happened inside the Vatican, Father Yohan! Also, his safety is under threat, and that's all you care about?

"How can I leave Father Lee Ki-Young's safety to those fools?!" Father Basel shouted.

"…"

"If this happens again, are you going to take responsibility for it? Father Yohan? Will you be able to ask Goddess Benigoa for forgiveness?! You've become completely blinded by the illusion before you, and it's not just you! I'm also talking about the priests who serve Goddess Benigoa!

"We're supposed to serve her and respect her wishes, so when did we…" Father Basel trailed off.

'The old man is on a roll. He's overreacting a bit, but he's full of energy. He needs to be full of energy.'

His political skills weren't bad either, so he definitely thought that this was the right time to say what he was saying right now.

"Have you not realized what's important and what's not?! Do you not see that Father Lee Ki-Young has compromised for us? Do you not see that?!" Father Basel shouted.

"…"

“We should be the ones asking for his help, but you’re worried that something bad might happen? Are you serious?! This incident is quite serious, Father Yohan!” Father Basel yelled with a flushed face and bloodshot eyes. The veins on his hands were bulging as well.

The sight made me feel worried that he’d get up and grab his mace, but seeing Father Basel yell for the first time in a really long time made me feel relieved.

Father Yohan was at a loss for words.

‘It’s your fault.’

Obviously, it was the entire Vatican’s fault for not taking responsibility for our safety. From the start, it was stated that my safety was the Vatican’s responsibility during the prayer service, which was the reason they were there with all the priests.

‘So they have no excuse.’

It wasn’t like Father Basel was bluntly saying that he was going to use the Blue Guild rather than them, as he couldn’t trust them.

We had also never said that we’d go wandering around the Vatican. He simply wanted to make the guild members stay here until things had simmered down.

Was that so bad? I was sure it was bad for Father Yohan, as he had a secret he desperately wanted to remain hidden.

‘Mole Saint’s Cozy Sanctuary.’

“The black mage earlier is part of the Blue Guild, Your Holiness.”

‘I knew he’d bring that up.’

“The monsters who ambushed Father Lee Ki-Young are capable of wielding holy power, Father Yohan! When are you going to get rid of that outdated way of thinking?!” Father Basel scolded.

“But it’s black magic, Father Basel! The same black magic that demons use to wreak havoc!” Father Yohan argued.

“And it’s the black magic that saved the followers and priests! The same black magic that saved all of you!” Father Basel retorted. Father Basel wasn’t afraid of advancement, and I really liked open-minded people like him.

“There’s a possibility that she made a contract with a demon, Father Basel.” Father Yohan pointed out.

It was a contract with Jung Ha-Yan, not with a demon.

Father Yohan looked at me.

Since Han Sora wasn’t here, I had to say something.

“I had no idea that she’s a black mage, but there’s one thing I’m sure of… she didn’t make a contract with a demon,” I said.

“You heard him! She didn’t make a contract with a demon! You heard him yourself!” Father Basel shouted.

“That’s—”

“Are you saying you don’t believe him? You don’t believe the Son of Benigoa and the Saint of Light?!” Father Basel questioned.

‘That’s right, I *said it. I’m right.’*

“You dare question and persecute the one who protected the followers while the incompetent Holy Knights sat around and sucked on their thumbs? Tell me, Father Yohan. The commander of the Holy Knights said that they couldn’t find traces of those damned monsters outside. Do you understand what that means?” Father Basel asked.

“…”

“It means those monsters were inside the Vatican all along,” Father Basel added.

“…”

“The summoner isn’t a demon! It’s someone from the Vatican!” Father Basel yelled.

Father Yohan's face turned pale. He was surprised to hear that, as he knew that they didn't summon those monsters.

"…"

"…"

I understood the reason behind their surprise.

I was the one behind this incident, after all.

'Benigoa's bloody tears have finally become useful… '

I obtained them during Benigoa's bankruptcy incident, so it had been a while since then.

CHAPTER 919
SERA (19)

- Father Basel is still a bit feisty. So what happened next?

'What do you mean?'

I could still remember how Father Yohan's face turned pale, so I was sure he was feeling ashamed. However, all I could tell Lee Ji-Hye was that he and the Templars were in the worst-case scenario. He had basically lost his opportunity to execute his plan while leading the Templars. Moreover, those bastards…

'They already know.'

I had no idea what was going on. I also had no idea why the monsters were after me, but I was sure they knew that today's incident had happened because of the Mole Saint's Cozy Sanctuary.

Of course, the reality was that I made all of this happen, but they had no idea that I had Benigoa's blood flowing in me. All they could do was make their own interpretations.

I wasn't sure whether the monsters were attracted to me because I had consumed Benigoa's blood or it was a side-effect born from the fact that the dungeon was still untouched, even though it had been quite a while since it went online.

Regardless, mutated monsters exiting the dungeon didn't really happen often, but it didn't mean that there was no precedence.

They probably thought about taking care of the anomaly that wasn't part of their plan before focusing on the faction war within the Vatican.

- You should've been there, Ji-Hye.

- It's a shame I wasn't there. I'm sure it was really fun. Anyway… so you almost got everything you wanted.

- Something like that.

- You convinced the Vatican to let the Blue Guild stay, exposing the faction war that's taking place within the Vatican, and you even managed to give power to Grandpa Basel.

-…

- Then, are we going to proceed with the plan?

- Not yet. I need to carefully select the people who are going to stand on my side. Father Yohan's side is wary of me, but he doesn't have the luxury to keep that up. I'm sure he's busy trying to get rid of the remaining evidence. *Ah!* I think the public is on my side. The recent event was a pretty big incident, after all.

- Well, it's an unprecedented incident… the Saint of Light was attacked during a prayer service, after all. People are already talking about it. But will it really be okay, oppa?

- If I join you, the Commander will have to handle the situation up there alone… Of course, he's pretty capable, but he's been pretty awkward with Kim Hyun-Sung recently, so things don't really look good. Moreover, all he does all day is talk badly about you.

- It's not like he's doing anything important. I'm sure he's capable enough to handle minor tasks on his own. I'm tied up down here, so we have to prioritize this task. I want you to rush over here…

- It doesn't really matter to me since I haven't been to a party in a while. I always enjoyed talking to people, too. This actually feels like a vacation.

- I'm glad you like it.

- I think it's more like you want to go. I know you really enjoy talking behind people's backs. You looked genuinely happy during the democratic revolution, after all.

- I'm not that type of person.

- Yeah, right… *Ah!* I'll call you back later. I need to go.

I looked at Lee Ji-Hye using my Telescope and saw her having the time of her life.

'She's a strange one as well.'

'Well, talking behind people's backs is pretty fun.'

- Let's go, Yeon-Soo.

- Okay.

- You scheduled everything, right?

- Yes, but the scheduled parties have been canceled. Instead, they're holding tea parties and small gatherings…

- They're just calling it that way. Do you really think that those people would do nothing when something really juicy had happened? I'm sure they had no choice but to cancel the parties because of the public's reaction, but they need to gossip more than ever.

- Investigate how many parties—I mean, gatherings are going to be held within this week.

- I just need to focus on the donors, right?

- Of course. If we want to put pressure, we need to do it properly, don't you agree? This isn't really my forte… but I think it's going to be fun.

'I think she's more than capable of doing this, but this really isn't my forte as well.'

- But unni… aren't you busy as well? Why…

- What? You think I'm wasting my energy on trivial things?

- No, that's not what I meant. Letting you do this when you're so busy… is a bit…

- Oppa needs proof. A proof that he had obtained information from the Black Swan Guild.

'She's right.'

- Muddying the waters isn't an easy task, you know?

-…

- That's especially true for this incident because this is *really* risky. If we're careful and convince the people to donate a large amount of money to the Vatican…

- Will we profit from that?

- The Vatican will have no choice but to be careful since not everyone there is innocent. It takes a lot of gold to pay the Heretic Inquisitors, priests, and the Holy Knights.

- There's also the Vatican's charity foundations. Do you know how much it costs to maintain the dignity of priests who are bishops or higher? Do you know how much that costs annually? They're only engaging in religious activities because they're getting paid well.

-…

- They're indirectly letting the factions know that they're making the wrong choice, and they need to stand with the correct side if they want to continue living a prosperous life.

- Benigoa isn't the only one they're serving. Some of them are also serving the precious god of gold, so imagine how fun this is going to be.

Ji-Hye noona definitely enjoyed being a part of the sidelines.

To be exact, she enjoyed hot topics and promoting conflict.

I had no idea how her personality became so twisted, but it was true that it was amusing to see one's target showing an interesting reaction to one's provocation. Obviously, I didn't give her that work to have fun.

'It's actually important work.'

Ha Yeon-Soo was confused about why Lee Ji-Hye was getting involved in such trivial matters…

'But it's like she said… '

I wouldn't give this task to anyone except for Lee Ji-Hye.

- Oh my, it's been a while.

- Have you been well, Miss Lee Ji-Hye?

- I contacted you recently, *hehe*.

- You did.

- Did your wife like the gift that I sent her?

- *Haha*. I actually wanted to thank you for that. *Ah!* You're here. Have a seat here, Senator Delarus.

- It's really been a while, Whitneys.

- I must really be invisible to you, Senator Delarus.

- Of course not. *Haha*. You've become even more beautiful, Miss Lee Ji-Hye.

- You won't get anything even if you compliment me.

- Looks like I failed.

Lee Ji-Hye was definitely a pro, and her way of talking was top-notch.

One had to be pretty skillful to make the other person comfortable and to create *that* kind of atmosphere. Lee Ji-Hye was so skilled that she could easily control a person's emotions. She was also skilled at leading the conversation, creating the right mood, and changing the subject naturally…

- Looks like Mr. Varus won't be able to make it today.

- It'll probably be hard for him. He's been looking forward to the prayer service… We just have to pray that he recovers.

This situation was the same as my situation in the Vatican, but this was actually

easier. She just needed to read their expressions and slowly make them talk about things that they were interested in.

- Our Black Swan Guild actually managed to obtain a certain piece of information. Actually, I'm not sure whether it's related to the recent incident or not, but… I heard that the Vatican is embroiled in a faction war.

- What?

- I believe that's the reason why Father Lee Ki-Young was in danger…

I would call this a success. It was enough to stimulate their imagination, and it was also enough information to let them know that the faction war was getting worse.

We could make it worse by saying that it was an assassination attempt on the honorary cardinal, but going that far was a bit…

- What? Then… did Father Yohan really…

- No. It's an unconfirmed piece of information. It's basically a rumor, so don't believe it, Whitneys.

It was amusing seeing them react that way exactly three hours later…

- We still need to confirm that piece of information… and we still haven't gotten any information on that monster capable of wielding holy power.

- They really tried to assassinate Father Lee Ki-Young… Is that what you're saying here?

- *Shh!* You're too loud.

- *Ah…* I'm sorry.

- It's not *that* big of a deal, and it's too early to overinterpret like that. No one knows who's behind it yet… But one thing we're sure of is that there are people within the Vatican who aren't fond of Father Lee Ki-Young and Father Basel.

- But it's a fact that Father Lee Ki-Young's safety was threatened because of the faction war…

- That seems to be the case…

- *Huh*… Father Yohan… I didn't think he was *that* kind of person.

- But we don't know for sure whether Father Yohan is actually the culprit or not, Whitneys.

- I suddenly feel like the world has changed, Miss Lee Ji-Hye. If only the religious people… were all like Father Lee Ki-Young…

- But Miss Lee Ji-Hye… Will Father Lee Ki-Young really be safe at the Vatican?

- Well, they allowed the members of the Blue Guild to stay at the Vatican with him. I'm sure Father Basel was worried about him as well.

- It's understandable. Come to think of it… before he was revived…

- Yes, Senator.

- The Vatican had claimed ownership of his corpse… Does that have anything to do with the recent incident?

'That's a long time ago… you're actually thinking that far back?'

- I don't know anything about that, so I can't confirm it.

- If Father Yohan is after Father Lee Ki-Young's body…

'What are you saying?'

- Then don't you think… the recent incident fits the situation, Miss Lee Ji-Hye?

- That can't be.

'What are you guys talking about? You guys are overinterpreting it. You shouldn't make someone look that bad.'

I was sure the people there knew better than anyone that their comments were ridiculous. They were probably just exaggerating things, as they really enjoyed gossiping.

Some of their comments were completely absurd, but Lee Ji-Hye of the Black Swan Guild easily transformed those ridiculous comments into something convincing.

I was definitely going to give her fifty points for letting people know that I was in a dangerous situation due to the ongoing faction war within the Vatican, and I'd give her another one hundred points if she told them that Father Yohan was at the center of it.

'It's even better if she turns Father Yohan into a total piece of shit.'

Four days was enough for rumors to spread.

It was easy to send someone to their grave in the blink of an eye.

I was sure that Benigoa Net would soon become a nightmare for him.

Actually, I didn't really think that he had any *real* power…

"The result will still be the same," I said.

It was time to reap what I had sown, but I also had to take care of the issue I had been putting aside these days.

"Miss Hye-Jin? Miss Hye-Jin!" I called out.

"…"

"Hye-JIn! Hey!" I yelled.

"What's wrong, sir?" Jo Hye-Jin asked.

"Did Ha-Yan get disciplined by any chance?" I asked.

CHAPTER 920
SERA (20)

"Is Ha-Yan getting disciplined by any chance?" I asked.

"Not yet. We're not in the situation to do that right now… I have received a general report, but the guild is still in the middle of making a decision," Jo Hye-Jin replied.

"I think it's best if I take care of it," I told her.

"I think so, too. You seem to have a better understanding of it, but the situation isn't that great right now… Personally, I think it will be better to lower the level of her punishment," Jo Hye-Jin suggested.

"I think I understand what you're saying," I said.

'I do need to start taking care of her mental health.'

"She gets kind of sensitive when other guild members try to deal with her," Jo Hye-Jin added.

"I know," I said.

'I'm sure it's difficult.'

I wasn't discriminating against Jung Ha-Yan and the other guild members, but Ha-Yan was above the guild's rules.

Sun Hee-Young, Hwang Jung-Yeon, and Jo Hye-Jin were higher in rank than her and had more authority than her, but they couldn't discipline her at all.

Actually, it was more like they respected her.

Jung Ha-Yan had more authority than the Tower Master of the Magic Tower, and she was so strong that she was second to none throughout the continent.

I thought about making a role for her, but at the time, I had no idea what trouble she'd cause, so I put it aside for now.

Jung Ha-Yan was in that state for a long time, so she ended up being untouchable in the guild. She was an official guild member, but no one could actually deal with her except Kim Hyun-Sung and me.

If I had to pick one more person capable of dealing with her, I'd pick Jo Hye-Jin, but Jung Ha-Yan wasn't wary of her at all.

It was up to her whether she wanted to take on a task or participate in a quest, and she didn't really receive any guild tasks. She'd either focus on a research task I had requested her to do or do things she wanted to do without gaining attention from others.

Well, Han Sora would take care of these tasks on her own, so technically, there wasn't anyone in the guild capable of making her do whatever they wanted her to do.

'And an assassination attempt on the Saint of Light has just taken place… '

It wasn't like the guild had a reason to delay things when they were known for taking care of things right away. I was sure the guild members and staff were on edge. Even Miss Kim Mi-Young had yet to contact me, so I assumed she was trying to take care of it.

"Where did that report come from? Was it from Miss Sora?" I asked.

"Yes. I heard she used up most of her mana upon conducting a magic experiment. It was a pretty big experiment, so it'll take her some time to recover.

"The reason she didn't submit a separate report is just as you expected and Miss Ha-Yan had apologized privately as well," Jo Hye-Jin answered.

"What?"

"She said she was sorry for causing trouble," Jo Hye-Jin replied.

'That's rare.'

"Then… we just need to deal with the part where she didn't report it to the guild in

advance." I pointed out.

'But she lied on her report… '

Since I was the one getting the report, she had to have asked Han Sora to lie on the report.

'Stop saying such ridiculous things.'

'You recover a ton of mana every second. You can do anything with a little bit of mana.'

"Then, I'll bring her here right now. I assume… you'll be handling it in your room," she said.

"Yes, I'll take care of it out of other people's sight. Don't let the other guild members know that Ha-Yan is getting disciplined. I don't want people to think she didn't get the discipline she deserved," I instructed.

"I'm sure no one will feel that way," Jo Hye-Jin commented.

Yeah, she was right.

"Also, are you really okay, sir?" Jo Hye-Jin asked.

"You heard the priests. I simply lost consciousness out of shock. I feel perfectly fine. I know what you're worried about, but it completely disappeared after my revival. You don't have to worry about it anymore," I reassured her.

"That's a relief," Jo Hye-Jin said. She then smiled and left the room.

'She worries a lot about useless things.'

I could still remember how she had written a post on Benigoa Net's main forums while crying upon hearing that I had fainted for no reason.

She already knew that my health conditions had disappeared upon my revival, but it seemed that the recent incident still brought a great deal of shock to her. I was sure she reacted that way because it was a pretty big incident, but she was overreacting in my eyes.

"*Ah!* Don't forget my request," I reminded her.

"Okay."

'I need to see what our informants will bring.'

Restoring Jung Ha-Yan's self-esteem was more important than waiting for them.

The effect of the potion was going to disappear today, and if I were to drag this any longer, she could experience side effects.

'I'm sure she's really scared.'

She had to have been struggling these days. More importantly, she definitely thought that she needed to hide this from me.

Naturally, she was worried about getting caught, and I was sure her anxiety was amplified to the max right now, as she knew that she was about to get caught. The fact that she had mentioned performing a large-scale magic experiment that was unknown to me meant that she was becoming desperate by spinning lies.

'People need to live an honest life.'

Or they ought to stop being nervous about lying. One would feel better by not thinking about getting caught at all. My words were proven by a nervous Jung Ha-Yan entering the room.

"D-D-Did you call for me? O-Oppa?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

Jung Ha-Yan was definitely sleep-deprived. She looked tired and mentally unstable.

Perhaps it was because of Han Sora, but she wasn't biting her nails, and her hair wasn't in a mess either. However, I couldn't deduce her feelings from her appearance alone. I could also see an unknown sense of resolve in her eyes.

Jung Ha-Yan probably thought that there was no way she'd allow herself to get abandoned. She was resolved to make sure that she wouldn't get caught and that she had to endure what was coming.

She looked like a lawyer preparing her final defense of a lifetime.

“Sit here, Ha-Yan. Do you want something to drink?” I offered.

“No, I’m okay,” Jung Ha-Yan replied.

“How about a cup of tea?” I suggested.

“O-Okay, I’ll drink it,” Jung Ha-Yan answered.

Han Sora wasn’t here to defend her, so I was sure they ran through several simulations and thought of excuses against the questions I could ask her.

“You know why I called you here, right?” I asked.

“Y-Yes,” Jung Ha-Yan replied.

Jung Ha-Yan was a bad liar.

“I received the report from Miss Hye-Jin. About the magic experiment…” I trailed off.

“Y-Yes! I-It was a really important experiment. I-I didn’t tell you because I wanted to keep it a secret from you. I-I… wanted to surprise you… b-but the experiment… failed. Still, it was really amazing. I want to tell you more about it…” Jung Ha-Yan trailed off.

“…”

“B-but I can’t use my spells right now… b-because of the side-effects from the experiment… I mean, I *can* use it… b-but I want to recover faster… s-so… I don’t want to use my spells for the time being,” Jung Ha-Yan continued.

“Oh yeah? What kind of experiment was it?” I asked.

“It was an experiment involving the assimilation of several conflicting spells. I-I was trying to fuse it directly into my body…” Jung Ha-Yan responded. She was still stuttering, but it wasn’t that bad, and it was all because her answers were prepared beforehand.

“I-I did it with Sora. S-She can tell you if you ask her,” Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

Jung Ha-Yan immediately mentioned a witness.

“When did you do it?” I asked.

“B-Before you joined Rafael’s party. It’s all written in the experimental log,” Jung Ha-Yan replied.

There was even an alibi.

‘She’s more meticulous than I thought.’

I was sure they went over the answers several times, as Han Sora was the one who came up with that alibi.

“I-I normally don’t make mistakes, b-but I probably wasn’t in my best condition back then. I-I think I was sick. I honestly thought that it wasn’t a big deal. I’m sorry for not letting you know ahead of time. I-I also apologized to all the other guild members with Sora,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“Oh yeah? Then…”

“I-I-I need to get disciplined… *Ah! Ah!* I caused trouble, so of course, I should apologize. I’m sorry,” Jung Ha-Yan said. She even showed me her mature side by acknowledging her mistakes.

“If possible, I want to avoid punishing you as well, but I have to worry about other people as well. You understand, right?” I asked.

“Y-Yes!” she replied.

“As a guild member, there are rules you must follow. This is for *your* safety, not for the safety of others. I hope you understand that,” I added.

“I see…”

‘She definitely thinks that I haven’t noticed it yet.’

‘Why does she look so cute?’

I was talking about the look of success on her face. She looked cute when she clenched her fist. She was bad at lying, so I could easily see through her lies, which made her appear even more innocent in my eyes.

I really wanted to end things here…

“Are you… telling the truth about the experiment?” I questioned.

“What?”

“I checked the logs a few days ago because I check your logs almost every day. I remember not seeing any mentions of an experiment before I left for Rafael’s party. Am I remembering it wrong?” I asked.

“*Ah*… w-well I forgot to upload—”

“I double-checked with the guild staffers and the guild members of the Magic Tower Guild,” I interrupted her.

“…”

“I don’t know what kind of experiment you were doing, but if it was that dangerous, then I’d already be aware of it. And you don’t look *normal* right now. Are you really speaking the truth? You’re not lying to me, are you?” I questioned.

“I-I-I-I wouldn’t… dare. I-I would… never lie… to you,” Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

‘Why won’t you look at me?’

Her hands were no longer clenched, and I could see her cowering before me. I could see cold sweat on her forehead, and she was biting her lips. She was looking away, clearly afraid to look at me.

“I-I-I don’t… feel so good…” Jung Ha-Yan said.

‘Are you saying you want to adjourn this meeting?’

Jung Ha-Yan wanted to go back to Han Sora and figure out a way to counter my questions, but I wasn’t going to let that happen.

“I’m fine with everything else, Ha-Yan,” I told her.

“*Huh?* W-What… do you mean…” Jung Ha-Yan asked.

“I’m really fine with everything else, but I don’t like it when you lie,” I said.

“I…”

“Especially when it’s about your health or the condition of your body,” I added.

Obviously, I looked at her warmly and touched her cheek as if I was telling her that she was the most precious person in the world to me.

Hyun-Sun and Jung Ha-Yan had seen this unique expression on me before.

‘You know I like you, right?’

“Really…”

‘You know you’re the only one for me, right?’

“*Ahhh… ah…*”

‘You’re the most important to me. I have no one else.’

The situation was serious, but I smiled. Of course, I didn’t really smile on the outside.

The thought of her alone was making me smile.

‘You’re that *special to me.’*

“I-I-I… so…” Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

‘The thought that something bad had happened to you or that you got hurt is unbearable for me.’

‘I want you to stay by my side.’

Forever…

‘I really want you by my side forever.’

“*Ah… ack…* O-Oppa…” Jung Ha-Yan muttered.

But…

“When did you lose your magic?” I questioned.

“…”

“…”

Jung Ha-Yan’s face instantly turned pale.

CHAPTER 921
SERA (21)

"What? W-What do you mean?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

'Look at me.'

"I-I don't understand… w-what you're saying. M-My magic…" Jung Ha-Yan paused.

'Look. At. Me.'

"I-I never lost it… *he… hehe*," Jung Ha-Yan said, chuckling.

I knew she was going to play innocent.

"*Hehe… he…*"

Jung Ha-Yan tried to improve the atmosphere by laughing, but her laugh sounded awkward in my ears. I wasn't sure whether she thought I was joking or she laughed to avoid this situation, but her body was speaking louder than her mouth at the moment.

"N-n-nothing happened to me. No way. B-But… I'm not feeling well right now," Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

'You're always feeling unwell.'

"I never lost my magic. That never happened. I-I think there's been a misunderstanding… *Ah*… maybe you thought that… because I'm not in the best condition," Jung Ha-Yan continued.

'This is going to take all day.'

It seemed that she had decided to feign ignorance.

Jung Ha-Yan seemed to have thought that she needed to make eye contact with me

because she was trying her best to look at me. She was trying her best to find a reasonable excuse, as she knew more about magic than me.

Jung Ha-Yan refused to back out of her stance, even though I had already confronted her.

I was sure she'd try to change the subject by saying that she was in pain or her stomach was hurting; she could also say that she wanted another cup of tea, and she could even make awkward jokes.

Honestly, I was convinced that she had no idea what she was saying right now.

I was sure her head had gone blank—blank as an empty sheet of sheet.

"B-But… Well… B-Back then, Sora…"

'Let's say her name again.'

"Ha-Yan."

'Stop avoiding it.'

"I'm saying it because I'm worried about you. You think I wouldn't know?" I questioned.

"W-What?"

I was certain that Ha-Yan knew that I was aware of her condition, as she was one of the few people who knew me the most. She knew what kind of person I was, so I was hoping that she wasn't thinking that I wouldn't know her true condition.

'You really think that you can fool me? You didn't think that way, did you?'

I cast a cold gaze at Jung Ha-Yan, and she cowered. She looked like she was thinking hard about what she was supposed to do.

She seemed to have realized that I was no longer the same Lee Ki-Young that she was familiar with, and her face became even paler at the realization.

It was then that she realized that the situation had gotten much more serious. I was

kind of worried about how I looked in her eyes right now… Actually, she seemed scared of me, just like in her past life.

Jung Ha-Yan hadn't noticed that she was breathing in ragged pants. She also hadn't noticed the beaded cold sweat on her forehead and the fact that her eyes were quivering ever so slightly.

Soon, tears started falling down her cheeks.

'This won't do.'

I had to be nicer to her.

"We shouldn't hide anything from each other," I told her.

"What? *Ah…*"

"I thought we were going to share our secrets with each other," I reminded her.

"…"

"I'm not scolding you. I just want to know why you're trying to hide this and why you didn't tell me earlier. I want to talk like we normally do… Why did you hide it from me?" I asked.

'Yeah, I just want to talk.'

"*Ah*… w-well…" Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

"You should've told me first the moment this happened… I want to know everything, Ha-Yan," I told her.

"…"

"I want to know everything about you," I said.

"I-I see…" Jung Ha-Yan said.

Since we had changed drastically compared to when we first met, it'd be more effective to talk to her like this rather than be straightforward about it. It seemed like

she somewhat agreed with my words, but I wasn't sure whether she had acknowledged it herself or not.

Honesty was probably *really* effective in situations like this.

I wanted her to know that I cherished her regardless of her level of competence.

'This is harder than convincing Kim Hyun-Sung to confess that he was a regressor.'

"We've known each other for a long time, and we promised to spend our future together…" I said.

'I like you more than you think.'

"I don't think there's anything more important than trust in our relationship," I added.

It seemed kind of one-sided, but trust was important.

"Right… t-trust… is important. Y-You're right," Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

"The most important thing is that we don't lie to each other," I said.

"Right… I shouldn't lie…" Jung Ha-Yan mumbled.

'I've fallen for you harder than you think. You really thought I would dislike you because of that stupid magic? You're smarter and more charming than you think. My feelings for you have to do with your magic.'

I touched her cheeks, and she relaxed gradually. I could tell that she was no longer feeling as nervous as earlier. I kissed her cheek, and she trembled. Then, I moved closer to her and asked, "Can you tell me honestly?"

"Y-Yes… I-I'll tell you," Jung Ha-Yan replied.

Jung Ha-Yan spoke as if she were possessed. Of course, she was nervous because this was a big deal to her.

I was certain that it wasn't easy for her to confess the fact that she had lost everything, and it was all because she thought that her magic was what made her

valuable.

I would have the same thoughts as her if I were in her shoes.

How could I tell people that I had suddenly lost everything one day?

It was like telling Kim Hyun-Sung that I had lost the Regressor Instruction Manual or telling my believers that I had lost my holy power.

It wasn't easy, and I completely understood what Jung Ha-Yan was feeling. She was scared and frightened. She definitely didn't want to do this; she was particularly scared right now, as magic was everything to her.

Jung Ha-Yan took a deep breath and said, "A-A few days ago… I-I suddenly—*heuk!*"

"…"

"I-I-I don't know why… but… I-I couldn't use my mana… I-I-It all disappeared… *Hiccup… Kgh*…" Jung Ha-Yan confessed.

The way she was trying to read my reaction while talking was pretty cute in my eyes.

"I kept trying… b-b-but… *Kgh…"* Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

"Really?"

"I-I-I'm… sorry… *Hiccup… Kgh…"* Jung Ha-Yan cried.

'You don't have to apologize to me.'

"Why are you apologizing? Is there anything wrong with your body?" I asked.

"*Huh?* I'm fine…" Jung Ha-Yan answered.

"What about your health?" I asked.

It was only natural for me to ask about her health before asking her more about how exactly she had ended up losing her magic. It was a touching way to go about the matter as well.

“Wouldn’t it be good to have… Miss Hee-Young or Miss Elena examine you?” I suggested.

“What?” Jung Ha-Yan said, sounding dumbfounded.

Of course, she was dumbfounded. The situation was going in a completely different way than she had expected, so she was finding it hard to adjust to it.

Had she expected me to act coldly or do something dramatic to her?

She was probably worried that I was going to tell her that I no longer needed her.

The possibility that she thought of me as some kind of a typical jerk protagonist made me feel kind of sad, but I was reborn as an exceedingly kind person. I *was* kind of cold at the beginning, but it happened a long time ago, and I had no choice but to be cold at the time as well.

‘So you misunderstood me, is that right?’

“Why didn’t you say anything?” I asked.

“*Ah*… well… you see…”

‘You didn’t know this was going to happen, right?’

I held her hand and stared at her with a worried gaze.

“Is it because of me?” I questioned.

I reflected on myself and thought that perhaps I had burdened her a bit too much.

This was possible *because* it was Jung Ha-Yan. If it happened to an ordinary mage, I was sure they’d abandon their tasks. Jung Ha-Yan managed to install warp gates throughout the continent and take care of the necessary steps that only a mage could do.

“I-I-It’s not because of you,” she answered.

‘It is *because of me.’*

“I-I don’t… really know the reason… b-but it’s not because of you. I-I think this is just temporary… I-I feel okay, though. S-Sora examined me… Y-You don’t have to worry,” Jung Ha-Yan reassured me.

“…”

“A-Actually… I-I’m feeling kind of sick. M-My head… and m-my chest hurts…” Jung Ha-Yan said.

‘I knew it.’

“I-I’m feeling kind of dizzy as well… Yes, I-I feel dizzy. I think I’m sick,” Jung Ha-Yan added.

“It would have been great if you had told me sooner,” I said.

It was really simple.

‘She must realize it.’

Jung Ha-Yan knew that it didn’t matter whether she had magic or skills and that all of it was just a misunderstanding. She was telling herself that it couldn’t be it. Of course, she was still doubtful, but she was starting to relax.

It was clear that she was feeling extremely relieved, and she was even…

‘She’s even smiling.’

“*He… hehe… hehehe…*”

She was in a *really* good mood.

“*Hehe… Heuk… Hiccup… Hehehe…*”

‘Why are you crying?’

“*Heuk… heuk… heuk…*”

‘This is kind of scary.’

"*He… hehehehe…*"

Stop…

Her strange laugh was probably part of the process of her realizing that she was wrong.

However, it seemed that she hadn't noticed that I was casting a nervous gaze at her.

'At least I managed to change her mind.'

Jung Ha-Yan chuckled like a madwoman, and she looked like I was telling her that I loved her. She was wrong when she thought that I would abandon her just because she had lost her magic and that she'd only get a reward by showing results.

I assumed she came up with that conclusion, as she was under a ton of stress recently, and I understood why she was struggling to accept that her mindset was wrong all this while.

Jung Ha-Yan's values and mindset had changed upon her arrival here, so it could be said that the reason behind her struggle was the fact that she was trying to recover the self-esteem that she had lost a long time ago.

"*Pfft… hehehe… Hiccup… Hehe…*"

"…"

"*Hehe… hehehehe—Ah.*" Jung Ha-Yan suddenly stopped laughing. I knew what she was thinking, and the next word that she muttered told me that my assumption was correct.

"Sera."

CHAPTER 922
GEN (1)

I thought it was going to take Jung Ha-Yan a lot longer to realize it, but it seemed that she cared about Sera more than I thought. It was proven by how she immediately thought of Seraphim the moment she accepted the fact that incompetence or achieving results didn't really matter when it came to her.

Jung Ha-Yan definitely tried not to think about him, but I was sure that a part of her was always thinking about him.

'It's a good sign.'

I was kind of annoyed and heartbroken, but this was right.

If Seraphim was making her happy, then there was no reason for me to get rid of him. Actually, I had plenty of reasons to get rid of him, but I was forced to keep him because he was a seed that I had sown myself.

After all, I had contributed a bit to what made Jung Ha-Yan today. Of course, the fact that she turned out this way was technically her family's fault.

"*Huh?*"

"I-It's nothing. *Hehe…*" Jung Ha-Yan laughed.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"I-I said it's nothing," Jung Ha-Yan answered.

"…"

"I-It's really… nothing…" Jung Ha-Yan repeated.

Naturally, she didn't immediately run to Sera and focused on me instead. Jung Ha-Yan's eyes were wide as she stared at me, looking like she hadn't made a fuss earlier.

She seemed to have realized that she was in a mess right now, as she was trying her best to look as lovely as possible.

"*He… hehe…*"

She was pretty cute.

"Am I… pretty?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"Yeah…" I replied.

"Do you like me?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"*Ah…* yeah," I responded.

"What do you… like about me?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"I like that you do your best in everything you do. You're kind, and you take care of the people around you. I like it when you focus on your studies, and being around you feels pretty relaxing. More importantly, you're pretty, cute, and lovely," I answered.

I was pretty good at lip service, but half of what I said was true.

I had to cheer her up a bit to make her feel better.

As expected, she started trembling…

"That's what I thought… from the first time I saw you," I added.

"W-What?"

I wasn't lying because I immediately thought about bringing her to my side the moment I saw her.

Jung Ha-Yan giggled, and she seemed to have thought that the atmosphere was romantic because she got closer to me. However, I felt awkward in the middle of this slightly romantic mood.

Jung Ha-Yan tilted her head at a forty-five-degree angle.

Perhaps she thought that the left side of her face was prettier because she was trying her best to show me the left side of her face. Her neck ended up getting twisted in a strange way, but she didn't seem to care about that.

I kissed her lightly, and she giggled.

And that was when a voice echoed outside the door…

"Father Lee Ki-Young."

"Ha-Yan," I said.

"*Shh*. D-D-Don't say anything, oppa," Jung Ha-Yan said.

'There's someone outside, damn it.'

"S-Surrender yourself… to your instincts," Jung Ha-Yan added.

'What the hell are you talking about? Where did you hear that from? Was it Kim Ye-Ri? Did you take Dance of Enchantment lessons?'

There was knocking on the door, and Jung Ha-Yan frowned upon hearing it.

"Father Lee Ki-Young, I'm sorry it's already so late…"

"Let's get up, Ha-Yan. It looks like I still have some work to do. Also… this is different from that. I need to handle some documents that need to be submitted as soon as possible. I think your punishment will be light, and… let's look into your magic together," I suggested.

'I'm sure she'll get it back today.'

"O-Okay… i-i-it can't be helped. I-I'll… see you later," Jung Ha-Yan said.

'You're coming here again?'

"Okay. Let's meet after work. I'll call you," I told her.

"O-Okay!"

Jung Ha-Yan opened the door, and I saw a priest outside. Jung Ha-Yan glared at him because he had ruined the romantic atmosphere, but the priest simply lowered his head without showing any reaction.

I knew why he came here. He probably wasn't one of Father Basel's men, as they had never really visited me during late hours without contacting me first. In addition, it was my first time seeing the priest before me.

'They're moving faster than I thought.'

It seemed that this incident was *that* important to them.

There was no way they'd know when I would execute my plan, so I assumed they contacted me first because they were feeling guilty. At this rate, their plan would get ruined, but they had already realized who was at the center of attention right now.

Of course, it was none other than me, which meant that their chances of winning would increase if they somehow managed to make me jump onto their side.

'They sure act fast.'

It seemed that they were *that* desperate.

'And they're quick-witted, too… '

My plan hadn't started yet, and there was no way the rumor that Lee Ji-Hye had started had already spread that far. In addition, Father Basel had yet to do anything that would make them move like this.

In other words, the reason behind this move of theirs was to prepare for what was to come. It seemed that they had an idea as to what was coming. I wasn't sure whether it was Gen or not, so perhaps this was Father Yohan or Simon's decision?

They could also be working together… Well, it didn't really matter.

"I'm sorry for visiting so suddenly," the priest said.

"It's fine. May I ask why you're here?" I asked.

"Templar Gen would like to speak with you," the priest replied.

'That's surprising.'

"What?"

"I'm sorry I can't tell you the details, Father Lee Ki-Young," said the priest.

"Templar Gen…" I said.

"Yes."

"Could you wait a bit? I need to get ready…" I told him.

"Then can I assume you're agreeing to his request?" the priest asked.

"Of course. I actually wanted to thank him… I'm glad he asked to meet," I responded.

I decided to wear just an ordinary priest uniform, nothing too fancy.

I didn't need to wear any accessories, as we were meeting secretly. Lee Chang-Ryeol and Park Lian were good candidates to come with me, as they were tight-lipped, and whenever they had to do something, they would always do it discreetly.

I sent a quick message to Jo Hye-Jin and examined myself in the mirror. I didn't see anything out of the ordinary, so I nodded in satisfaction. I looked kind of tired and sick, but I actually liked that look right now.

"Let's go," I said.

"I'll guide you," he said.

The Vatican was dark at night.

There were priests and monks praying or carrying out their tasks, but the place remained quiet and dark. The stationed guards didn't show any reaction upon seeing me. They were obviously greeting me, but they didn't perform any special actions like a salute or something else.

I assumed it was all because they were Father Yohan's men.

The Holy Knights here were probably taking turns standing guard, and it seemed

that Templar Gen had asked me for a meeting when it was time for Father Yohan's men to stand guard here.

Those who weren't his men were probably bribed… or they were on Father Basel's side.

'It's more systematic than I thought.'

The faction war seemed bigger than I originally thought.

I looked around and couldn't see the Holy Knights in places where they'd normally walk around to patrol the Vatican. The corridor was massive and quiet, so the atmosphere was kind of scary, especially when there was no one else here but the priest.

'These bastards. I hope they're not trying to assassinate me. Was I too hasty when I accepted this request for a meeting?'

Could Lee Chang-Ryeol and Park Lian take on the Templars?

I wasn't really worried, as I had already let Jo Hye-Jin know, but being more cautious wasn't going to hurt anyone.

If they were going to harm me, it would be an opportunity for me.

They'd basically be digging their own grave if they were to do that, so I was certain that they wouldn't do something stupid like that.

The walk to our destination felt pretty boring, so I used my Telescope to look around.

- O-Oppa… s-said that he likes me. He said I'm pretty… and l-lovely.

- Really? I told you that was going to happen, Miss Jung Ha-Yan.

- I-It must not matter to him whether I have magic or not. I-I think he just likes me. H-He like me, even without magic.

- I like you too, even without magic. And I'm sure everyone feels the same way as me.

- I-I must be pretty. Do I look pretty to you, Sora?

- Of course. You're very lovely.

- *He… hehehe.*

- *Ha… haha…*

- *Ah!* Where's Sera?

- I'm not sure. He's probably asleep by now…

- F-Forget it then. H-How about we visit him tomorrow?

- Really?

- Y-Yeah.

- I'm sure Sera will really like that, Miss Jung Ha-Yan.

- W-We should look around the temple together.

- How about inviting the sub guild master as well?

- I-If only he has time…

'I don't think… I'll have time… '

"Father Lee Ki-Young?"

"…"

"Father Lee Ki-Young."

"*Ah*… I'm sorry. I was… distracted for a moment," I said.

"We're here," the priest said.

"Okay."

"He's waiting inside. Hope you enjoy your time…" said the priest.

“Thank you,” I said.

The priest led me to a small door. The room beyond the door didn’t seem that big to me, but when I opened the door, it was actually pretty big.

Gen called me, and his appearance didn’t really change at all.

His expression was indifferent, but his gaze was filled with mixed emotions, and it was bothering me.

“I’m sorry for the rude invitation,” Gen said.

“It’s fine. I’m sure you had no other choice. I actually wanted to thank you,” I told him.

I nodded to tell him that I understood his position, but I didn’t mean that in a political sense. I was the Saint of Light, and I was aware that the Templars were a group of people that had to remain hidden from the public.

“And I really… wanted to meet you again,” I added with a hint of guilt.

‘He was forced to come here.’

Based on Gen’s personality, he wasn’t the type who’d take the initiative to do something, so I assumed that he was forced to do this. The order to talk to me had probably come from either Father Yohan or Simon.

He looked uncomfortable, and I wasn’t sure exactly why, but he was staring at me as if I was pitiful.

‘It’s probably because I’m the honorary cardinal who had sacrificed myself for the continent. I’m smart, but I’m an innocent saint ignorant of the evil of this world. I’m a saint whose job is to instill faith in everyone’s heart; I’m a monk who will stubbornly go on my way despite knowing that the journey will inflict tremendous pain on me.’

I was an honorary cardinal who had unwittingly found myself in the middle of a faction and power war within the Vatican.

‘Shit, that’s a pretty good setup.’

It was highly likely that he was given the mission to receive my approval, so I understood why he was staring at me as if I was pitiful. I felt like I finally knew why he requested to meet me when he had been avoiding me.

Templar Gen was basically trying to pull in the innocent saint into the wicked and dirty political scene, and he was going to do that by…

'By weaponizing the good impression that I had of him… '

'You jerk. Are you to stain this white piece of paper?'

'You wicked jerk.'

'You disgusting jerk.'

'You dirty jerk.'

"I can't stop thinking about our conversation and the scenery we saw together at the time. We've met each other again sooner than I thought… so I'm happy," I told him. I had to smile brightly at him because that was my role. "Looks like we'll talk about the goddess all night long."

CHAPTER 923
GEN (2)

"I'd like to thank you first for helping me," I said.

"It's fine. Like I said before, I was simply doing my job," Gen said.

"If you hadn't been there during that time, I don't know what would've happened…" I told him.

"I'm sure someone else would appear if I weren't there," Gen said.

'Why is he so humble?'

'I'm telling you that I'm thankful.'

"You're always humble… Mr. Gen… does my word make you uncomfortable?" I asked.

'Do you feel uncomfortable by the fact that I'm constantly thanking you? Did I do something wrong?'

"No, it's nothing like that… It's just…" Gen paused.

"I was simply thanking you from the bottom of my heart. If that bothers you…" I said.

'So you're trying to say that I did something wrong… '

The honorary cardinal had made a mistake.

The innocent honorary cardinal had made a big mistake.

I looked down quietly to thank him from the bottom of my heart, but my actions were making him uncomfortable. I understood why he was uncomfortable, and it was probably because the Templars were ignorant of the outside world.

In other words, they had no idea that I was the type to express my gratitude to my

benefactor.

It seemed that Gen's mind had gone blank in the face of my aggressive expression of gratitude. He didn't have the luxury of time to think about his next course of action. In the end, he did something surprising by kneeling down and getting on one knee.

"I was out of line, Father Lee Ki-Young. I didn't think that you'd feel that way…"

'What's wrong with him?'

'He's acting like he's some medieval knight.'

"Please stand up. It's unlike you to act like this. I feel like I made things uncomfortable between us, and I feel bad about it. How about we sit down?" I suggested.

"…"

"Please sit, Mr. Gen," I said.

"Yes, sir."

He seemed more tense than the first time we met, and it was understandable.

He wasn't used to situations like this, and it was also… pretty rude of him to summon me to this room.

Not only was he not the right candidate for this task, but he didn't want to do it in the first place. However, there had to be something going on behind the scenes, as his actions were bothering me.

An example of this was the way he suddenly got down on one knee.

Of course, this was just my assumption, but…

'You've completely fallen for the God of Sacrifice and Revival, haven't you?'

I wasn't sure whether he was aware of that or not.

I wasn't sure whether our previous conversation was effective or if it was because of

my actions during the previous prayer service, but I was probably acting like the honorary cardinal he had imagined.

I was acting like the saint who had sacrificed everything for the continent. He probably thought of me as some kind of great holy man. It was possible that a recent event had changed his thoughts or made me look holier in his eyes.

Gen was acting like he was serving a higher figure or someone who had to be worshiped.

“How about a cup of coffee? If you’re okay with that, I’ll—”

“I-I’ll do it, Father Lee Ki-Young,” Gen interrupted me.

“Please stay seated. I apologize for saying this… but I can’t imagine you making coffee,” I told him.

‘His coffee probably doesn’t taste good.’

“I’m… sorry about that,” Gen said.

“*Hahaha*, it’s fine. The Holy Knights seem kind of unfamiliar with things like this. It’s actually surprising. Anyway, excuse me,” I said.

But there wasn’t any coffee, damn it.

I thought there’d be some coffee in the cabinet, but there wasn’t any coffee in the cabinet.

‘Who treats a guest like this?’

However, there was some wine.

“There’s no… coffee,” I told him.

“I’ll ask them to bring some,” Gen suggested.

“No, it’s fine, Mr. Gen. It’ll make the other priests uncomfortable… I think it’s best if we talk over a glass of wine,” I suggested.

'It's wine that I'm pouring for him on my own.'

"I honestly don't like discussing Goddess Benigoa while drinking wine…" I confessed.

"…"

"But I enjoy drinking wine from time to time. Have you heard of people saying I enjoy drinking wine?" I asked.

I was trying to tell him that I wasn't *that* narrow-minded.

My words just now were pretty good.

"I haven't…" Gen replied.

"I don't enjoy getting drunk, but I do enjoy drinking with people I like. Like today," I said.

"Thank you…" Gen mumbled.

"Is this… where you normally spend your time?" I asked.

"Not really…" Gen answered.

"I see. Then where do you…" I paused.

"It probably won't be fun to hear it. All I have in my room is a desk, books I read, and weapons. I rarely spend time in my room. I spend… most of my time outside. I carry out missions, train, or pray… I'm sure it's kind of boring for you…" Gen replied.

"Not at all. You're part of the Vatican's secret group, so there's no way I'll be bored by your stories. Actually, I'd like to hear more," I told him.

I honestly wasn't all that interested, as their routine was pretty obvious.

Still, behaving like this was helpful.

A secret group within the temple…

The honorary cardinal, who loved every single part of the world, would definitely go

crazy over such a story.

I made sure that my eyes would sparkle, and I also had to look excited about it. I had to make it enjoyable for him to talk about it. I was sure there were some things he couldn't tell me about, but there was still a high chance that he'd give me a useful piece of information.

Gen's mission was receiving my approval.

If he wanted to fulfill his mission, he needed to give me information that was helpful but wasn't classified.

"Of course, if you're uncomfortable about telling me…"

"It's fine. I just… don't know where to start…" Gen said.

"Then, can I ask how you became a Templar?" I asked.

"I can't tell you the details, but I didn't train with the Order of the Holy Knights," Gen answered.

"*Ah…*"

"I remember training at a young age to do this kind of job. I had been spending my days at an orphanage managed by the Order until one day…" Gen paused.

"I see. I'm sure the training was tough," I commented.

"There were times when I felt physically tired, but I was never mentally tired. Perhaps it's because of the thought that I'll be able to serve Goddess Benigoa if I just persevere, but my mind was always filled with the holy spirit.

"Of course, I was different from the other children living an ordinary life, but I considered the fact that I was chosen to be an honor, and I remember being thankful for everything when I was chosen," Gen continued.

"Goddess Benigoa is always with us," I said.

"That's right."

“However, I’m sure all of that wasn’t because of her grace. You’re the person you are today because of your thoughts, your attitude toward life, your gratitude toward her, and your hard work,” I told him.

“*Ah…*”

“I’m sure Goddess Benigoa, who has been watching over you, will agree with me. That’s why you became an amazing Templar, and that’s why you were given the role to praise her and make her shine even brighter,” I added.

‘It’s like he’s been living under a rock.’

“I see…”

“Of course, I can’t speak for Goddess Benigoa. I’m simply telling you my thoughts…” I told him.

“That’s more than enough, Father Lee Ki-Young,” Gen said.

I just told him that all the time he had spent to become a butterfly was worth it.

It was possible that he was already feeling that way, but I was sure it felt different hearing it from the Son of Benigoa. As expected, Gen looked like he was feeling better.

We drank two glasses of wine, and the mood became better than I thought.

The fact that I didn’t ask any questions about why he had decided to request a meeting out of the blue was pretty effective.

Rather than urging him to tell me the reason behind it, it was better to listen to his story, exaggerate my reaction, and look at him with sparkling eyes. He looked like he had completely forgotten his mission.

Perhaps it was because he genuinely enjoyed spending time with me.

“I see. Did you receive that kind of training as well?” I asked.

“Yes,” Gen replied.

That was easy.

"I expected it, but it's kind of interesting. I met Goddess Benigoa after crossing over to the continent… I'm curious about what it feels like to be with her the moment you're born," I commented.

I needed to be careful because I didn't want him to know that I was trying to extract information from him.

"Amazing, *haha*," I laughed and clapped my hands exaggeratedly.

I was actually acting a bit *too* relaxed. I was always tidy and quiet. Naturally, the people respected me a lot. In other words, laughing and clapping like a child would make me look out of place. Showing my drunk side as an honorary cardinal could disappoint some people, but at least Gen wasn't disappointed.

I was actually showing my true self.

Although I had heavy responsibilities and burdens, I enjoyed worldly things and was no different from other people. This setup was working on him. I felt like I finally knew why those jerks brought some wine here, but their move was great for me as well.

I was laughing in a comfortable manner, which I only showed when I was around people I really liked. In order to show I was slightly intoxicated, I fanned myself with my hand and placed my chin on my hand.

"Are you okay?" Gen asked.

He obviously worried about me. He looked so worried about me that I felt like my worry about getting kidnapped by him was pointless. It didn't make sense from the start, but I felt stupid for even considering the possibility.

'It'll hurt them more.'

Things would become *really* chaotic if I were to suddenly disappear from the Vatican. In addition to giving Father Basel the justification to execute his plan, the believers would go crazy as well.

To make matters worse, Ji-Hye noona had already spread the rumor that Father

Yohan and the Templars were the culprits behind the recent incident, so if I were to go missing, all hell would surely break loose.

The Holy Knights and the Heretic Inquisitors would barge into Father Yohan's room.

He'd be questioned, and he'd end up getting hanged.

'Huh?'

The nation would annihilate the remaining Templars as well.

'Huuuh?'

The Mole Saint's Cozy Sanctuary would be immediately revealed, and they'd be able to skip the complicated parts that were supposed to be unskippable before one could reach the dungeon.

'Huuuuh?'

I glanced over at Templar Gen and saw that he was still staring at me with a worried face. He seemed to have completely forgotten about his mission, and it seemed like he didn't have to complete his mission tonight.

'I wonder how long it'll take to win him over.'

One month? One week?

Perhaps that would be enough for Ji-Hye noona to take care of all of it.

"It's really late, Father Lee Ki-Young. You should return…"

I was sure we'd have more meetings like this.

Moreover, only a few peopl were aware of this secret meeting of ours.

'Should I use my charm on him?'

It would be kind of random, but I appeared to be really drunk.

I was filled with holy power, but I couldn't hold my liquor.

I decided to talk in a sad way.

“Mr. Gen.”

“Yes?”

“H-Have you…” I stuttered.

“Yes?”

“Traveled the world… have you explored the continent?” I asked.

I was a saint trapped in responsibilities and burdens.

And the knight who would kidnap—no, set me free was right in front of me.

CHAPTER 924
GEN (3)

"Yes, that's right," I[1] said.

"I knew it. Is it for a mission?" Lee Ki-Young asked.

"I can't tell you the details, but it's something like that," I answered.

"That's interesting. So it's like a secret mission," Lee Ki-Young said.

"Yes."

"So even the numerous kingdoms in the Union of Kingdoms…" Lee Ki-Young asked.

"I visited almost all of them. Of course, they were short visits… but the short amount of time I spent in those places was enough for me to fully understand them," I told him.

"What was the Larmaria Mountains like? Have you visited the famous cultural kingdom, the Gelira Kingdom? What about Po Hoa, the historical site filled with inscrutable secrets? What were the people like there?" Lee Ki-Young asked.

"I had the opportunity to spend a long time in the Gelira Kingdom," I told him.

"Can you tell me more?" Lee Ki-Young requested.

"Of course, Father Lee Ki-Young. So… there's a famous artist there, and he's…" I recounted.

"I see. I saw his works from afar before. I thought the techniques he used to express himself were very unique… The same goes for the architectural styles of the kingdom, which shows everyone its boundless history.

"Ah! Come to think of it, I heard the legacy of the hero Jarvahan, who unified the Union of Kingdoms, is actually located there. Is that true?" Lee Ki-Young mentioned.

"That's right. The dungeon was cleared, but I don't think the owner has appeared yet. I think the owner may never appear, and…" I replied.

"Ah! There are secrets in the Larmaria Mountains, right?" Lee Ki-Young asked.

"*Yes. There's a village where fairies live, but I've never really seen them…"* I told him.

"Fairies… It really sounds like a fairy tale. I heard fairies enjoy pulling pranks… Have you ever been… pranked by fairies before, Mr. Gen?" Lee Ki-Young asked.

I could vividly remember the conversation we had just yesterday.

"I wasn't myself yesterday…" I mumbled. I was so different from my usual self yesterday that I started questioning how I managed to hold a conversation with Father Lee Ki-Young.

He was also completely different from what I had imagined, and I couldn't understand him to the point that my opinion about him had changed completely. The God of Sacrifice and Revival, the Son of Benigoa, and the Saint of Light.

He had many titles, but I thought they were all exaggerated titles.

Of course, I had no doubts that Father Lee Ki-Young had performed miracles, but I had doubts about him as a person.

I had heard many things about holy beings from up above, but I wasn't sure whether they truly existed or not. Were they actually real? And was he really the widely acclaimed saint blessed by Goddess Benigoa Herself?

Was he really a messenger chosen by the Goddess?

My brain was telling me not to doubt Goddess Benigoa's will, but my heart was telling me that something was off. However, my opinion about him changed completely as soon as I met him—wait, no, it was actually when I saw him at that prayer service

"I think there's a new threat on the continent. The things that are happening right now can't be considered normal…" Father Lee Ki-Young muttered.

"Father Lee Ki-Young…" I mumbled.

“But I believe we can overcome it. Goddess Benigoa won’t give us a trial we can’t overcome. She will always give us the power *to overcome any trial,”* Father Lee Ki-Young added.

“Lee Ki-Young… I muttered.

“The continent has always been like that. There are threats everywhere, but the continent becomes a bit stronger and tougher after overcoming every threat.

“The trials caused us pain and hardships, but I believe that those pain and hardships are the reason we get to live on this beautiful continent and look at its blue sky,” Father Lee Ki-Young added.

It was then that my opinion of him changed completely. He was exactly what society had described him to be.

He was always humble…

He loved the light and humanity.

More importantly, he was always prepared to sacrifice himself.

Son of Benigoa…

The Incarnation of Light…

The selfless saint always willing to sacrifice himself—no, it was more like he was a saint who had no choice but to sacrifice himself. Despite that, the strange feeling that there was something amiss hadn’t gone away, but I had a feeling that I knew the reason behind that feeling.

Perhaps the side of him that I had witnessed last night was Father Lee Ki-Young in his “human” form. Perhaps… perhaps I had a conversation with the Father Lee Ki-Young, who wasn’t wearing his mask as the Son of Goddess Benigoa.

Perhaps I was talking to the Father Lee Ki-Young with no responsibilities and burdens on his shoulders. I was probably talking to that side of him yesterday.

“I see. Fairies… Can we even see that?” Father Lee Ki-Young asked.

"They say that fairies don't leave their domains. The continental law prohibits possession and confinement of fairies… so you'll probably have to go to their territory yourself to see them," I answered.

"Ah… I knew it… That's a shame. It'd be nice if I could see them someday," Father Lee Ki-Young said.

It was short, but the time we spent felt really long, and it was probably because I had never seen him so disheveled. He got drunk after just one glass of wine, and the way he stammered while talking about going on an adventure with a smile made him think that I was talking to the human version of Lee Ki-Young last night.

It was further evidenced by how he couldn't stop asking me questions about my stories as if he were a child who had yet to explore the world.

It was probably an honor to become Goddess Benigoa's Chosen One—no, not probably, it was definitely an honor, but was that the kind of life that he wanted to live?

Was laying down everything and sacrificing himself for religion, the continent, and the denizens the life he truly wanted to live? He loved the beautiful scenery of the world more than anyone, so was living a trapped life what he truly wanted?

I knew it was absurd for me to think about this. I knew that I wasn't supposed to be thinking about it, and it wasn't my business as well.

However, I couldn't stop recalling his sincere face.

"I'm jealous. Being able to travel all around the world is just…" Father Lee Ki-Young trailed off.

"You can also…"

"Ah, right. I did travel around the continent… Yeah, I used to travel a lot. A long time ago… I was temporarily working as an… adventurer," Father Lee Ki-Young said.

I assumed that this wasn't the life he wanted to live.

He was always surrounded by temple priests and the bodyguards of the guild. Then, he had to fulfill his obligations by visiting designated locations and safe places. I

assumed that was his version of travel and adventure.

It was possible that he had never seen the things that he actually wanted to see, and I was convinced that he felt like he was trapped at the top of a tower.

"I-If you don't mind, can we meet tomorrow as well? I'd like to hear more about your adventures, Mr. Gen," Lee Ki-Young requested.

"Templar Gen…" A voice echoed behind me, interrupting my train of thought.

I turned around slowly and saw a familiar figure.

"Yes, Templar Simon," I answered.

"How did it go with Father Lee Ki-Young?" he asked.

"I haven't told him yet," I replied.

"…"

"…"

"I think what you're doing is a great idea as well, Templar Gen. Our chances of successfully roping him in will become higher if you get closer to him first before telling him anything. However, you should be careful, as he's close to Father Basel.

"Right now, Father Basel is at the center of things in the Vatican…" Templar Simon suggested.

"Understood," I said.

"Anyway, I'm glad he likes you. I don't know why… *Haha*… What do you think? Do you think he knows something…" Templar Simon asked.

"Do you think he does?" I questioned.

"Of course not. He is Father Lee Ki-Young, after all. He only cares about the safety of the denizens, religion, and Goddess Benigoa. There's no way he'd know what's happening in the Vatican and that the believers are becoming corrupt," Templar Simon answered.

That wasn't true at all, but… I had to nod for now.

"Once he realizes that the true light is in this place, he'll definitely join us," Templar Simon remarked.

"Templar Simon," I called out.

"Yes, Templar Gen."

"Do you have any plans on canceling this plan…" I asked.

"Are you not satisfied with bringing Father Lee Ki-Young to our side?" Templar Simon asked.

"…"

"Templar Gen, you've always been like this. You're kind and warm, and you have this unnecessary sympathy for everything. However, we don't need those weak emotions right now.

"Just take a look around the continent. Look closely at the things that are happening on the continent right now. Everything must be reverted before Goddess Benigoa abandons us," Templar Simon explained.

"…"

"We must revert the corrupted Vatican to the way it was before; we must capture the corrupted believers and offer them to her. You know better than anyone that we can't just stand by and watch like we did before.

"We were bestowed upon this power so that we can take action. Templar Gen, we have to do something, or nothing will change. The history of the continent is written by those with purpose and empowered by faith and light. Just like us," Templar Simon said.

"But Templar Simon…"

"Father Lee Ki-Young will understand us as well. I don't want to drag him to a place full of dirty and corrupt people, but it is going to be okay, as that is his role," Templar Simon added.

“It’s not his job to sacrifice himself, Templar Simon,” I argued.

“It’s not a sacrifice. It’s a revolution. If we get Father Lee Ki-Young on our side, many believers will support us, Templar Gen. It’s obvious…” Templar Simon replied.

“Right…” I mumbled.

“I believe he’ll support us because this is Goddess Benigoa’s will. If he’s really the Son of Benigoa, he’ll support us more than anyone else out there,” Templar Simon added.

“…”

“…”

“I know you’re bothered by this, Templar Gen. However, you have to think about a better future,” Templar Simon reminded.

“…”

“According to Father Yohan, Father Basel is already making his move,” Templar Simon told me.

“Is that true?” I asked.

“There have been rumors that he’s gathering senators and figures with power to blame Father Yohan for the recent incident. Apparently, he’s using malicious rumors and fabricated stories to rope them in,” Templar Simon answered.

“…”

“You have one week,” Simon said.

“When you say one week…”

“You must bring him to our side in one week. Everything depends on you. I want to resolve this without shedding any blood, Templar Gen. I’m sure Father Lee Ki-Young doesn’t want a bloodbath to happen inside the Vatican either,” Templar Simon clarified.

Of course, he wouldn’t want that to happen. Actually, I was sure that he couldn’t even

imagine a bloodbath happening inside the Vatican.

I couldn't tell whether this was the right thing to do or not.

Actually, I knew we were righteous.

It was really clear why Goddess Benigoa had bestowed this power upon us and why all of this was happening. The power we received from her was supposed to be used for her. Even a child could figure that out.

"So… what's Father Lee Ki-Young like?" Templar Simon asked.

I looked away and stared into space as I recalled the kind of person Father Lee Ki-Young was.

I felt like I could see him surrounded by believers and praying in front of a statue.

The sight of him hugging and comforting them while smiling was blinding to me.

However, I was convinced that he wasn't smiling genuinely. I couldn't help but think that way after witnessing him gaze at the sky with an empty look during our short meeting.

"He's an unfortunate… and pitiful person," I replied.

He was a saint who couldn't fly despite loving the vast sky filled with light more than anyone else. He was a saint trapped in the temple despite loving the continent more than anyone else.

"He's… very heartbroken," I added. He was still sacrificing himself for the continent while hiding his true self in the blinding light.

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1. Gen's POV ☜

CHAPTER 925
GEN (4)

"What are you thinking about, Father Lee Ki-Young?" a priest asked.

"It's nothing," I[1] answered.

"Thank you… for today. Father Jernihan will be arriving soon," the priest informed me.

"Thank you," I said.

I had no choice but to be determined because that was my role. I had long gotten used to hiding my true self and pushing aside my true desires, as I was the saint chosen by the light. As an honorary bishop, I would never cry, no matter how painful or sad I was.

I was going to accept my holy role with joy and honor.

I woke up at the usual time, prayed, and finished my personal schedule.

I completed my boring and repetitive tasks every day.

'I need to be persistent.'

I had things I wanted to do and see, but as the honorary cardinal, I had no choice but to hide my desires because that was what the world wanted me to do, and that was what… Goddess Benigoa wanted from me.

My fate was to stay clean and live my life for others.

'I want to travel.'

I wanted to go on an adventure.

I wanted to see interesting and mysterious things and live with ordinary people.

I also wanted to know what it felt like to be the real me. The blue sky was vast, but I couldn't go anywhere.

I had wings that allowed me to fly into the vast sky, but I couldn't spread my wings. I knew I wasn't allowed to do that, and I had long gotten used to sacrificing myself. Living for the things I loved more than myself was a beautiful and happy thing.

However, I'd sometimes look at the sky with an empty gaze.

"Traveling…" I mumbled.

- Don't be ridiculous. You don't like traveling, oppa.

'Why did you have to ruin the mood?'

- You know that suddenly acting like that isn't convincing, you know that, right? You hate adventures and expeditions, after all. You don't like sleeping outside because it hurts your back, and you don't like marching because it hurts your legs and shoulders…

- Have you ever carried your own backpack? You always made that pig carry it for you… The only thing you know how to do is destroy a campfire. You probably don't even know how to set up camp.

- That's not true.

- Actually, there is a type of travel you'd like. A safe and luxurious one. The camp has to be a place that never gets dirty, and there has to be someone who will carry you whenever you're feeling a bit tired.

- It sounds strange to hear that you want to travel and go on adventures when you're much more of a clean freak than me. You only started walking a few kilometers every day after learning about Jung Ha-Yan's warp gates.

- Can you leave me alone so I can focus?

- It's because you're being a real eyesore. I can't believe there's an idiot who believes you.

"…"

- I thought you were working on something ridiculous…

- That's why I need to focus, and it actually sounds convincing, you know? Also, think about it, noona. Do you know how much I've struggled at the time just to survive? I even went on dungeon expeditions back then. Anyway, this coin is going to make us rich.

Basically, the small child inside the Saint of Light wanted to see the world.

'I do have records of working as an adventurer before entering the Vatican and being chosen by Goddess.'

With my realistic acting, my story would sound pretty convincing.

- I would look into the distance or stare out into space with an empty gaze… I've been doing this more often, as I've been seeing him every day recently. His reaction is much better than I thought.

- Yeah, I'm sure it is.

- Our conversation was awkward at first, but at some point, he started having more fun than me. He'd show me documents and describe things to me passionately. He makes me feel like I've been to those places.

-…

- He's kind of stupid, but he's passionate. He's *really* determined.

- And that could be all he has to offer. There's no guarantee that Templar Gen will take you out from here. To him, that would be like disobeying Benigoa.

- It's only difficult in the beginning, and thinking of it as an act of disobeying Benigoa is an overinterpretation. We just need to start with simple conversations, and it's important to take it slow from there until it eventually becomes a *tada!* moment.

- Are you sure?

- If things go according to plan, I'll be leaving the Vatican today.

- Well, I hope your plan works out. *Ah!* I need to head out and spread more rumors.

How are things over there?

- It's chaotic.

- Not bad.

With that, the call ended.

Since Ji-Hye noona was doing her job, I needed to start doing mine.

As soon as I knocked on the table, I saw a familiar figure.

"Father Lee Ki-Young."

"It's been a while, Father Jernihan," I greeted.

He was neither on Basel nor Father Yohan's side.

He was a stubborn priest serving the honorary cardinal with sincerity.

"I heard… you requested to go out," Father Jernihan mentioned.

"That's right," I said.

"May… I ask why?" he asked.

There was no need to be nervous. I just need to explain what I needed.

"As you already know… there's a plague outbreak," I said.

It was really coincidental, and I mean *really* coincidental. As always, I took an interest in the outbreak.

"I heard the priests are currently dispatched to the affected regions, so I'm thinking that I might be able to help them, Father Jernihan," I responded.

"…"

"…"

“I’m sorry, Father Lee Ki-Young. The Vatican is doing everything within its power to calm the situation down. It’s not as serious as you think… so you don’t need to worry about that. Right now, your safety is the top priority…” Father Jernihan said.

“But Father Jernihan…”

“I understand how you feel, Father Lee Ki-Young. However, it hasn’t been a week since the assassination attempt. The Vatican is doing its best to investigate the situation internally… but we haven’t figured it out yet. Going outside at a time like this—”

“But the people are in pain, Father Jernihan,” I interrupted him.

“The Vatican sent priests to provide support to them, Father Lee Ki-Young. They’re doing their best to get the plague under control… so you…”

“Father Jernihan. Don’t think you can fool me. You know you can’t get this plague under control that easily. I’ll—no, if the Vatican won’t allow it, then I’ll go with the Blue Guild. Please take me to Father Basel. I’ll tell him myself and go,” I ordered.

“The Blue Guild has already agreed to this. The guild and the Order of Benigoa are working while considering your safety as the top priority. If you really want to leave, I’ll push for it, but you must think about the realistic problems you must bear, Father Lee Ki-Young,” Father Jernihan warned.

‘That’s what I’m talking about. That’s the answer I wanted to hear.’

“We consider your safety as our top priority, so we’ll have no choice but to dispatch guards with you. Many Holy Knights, Heretic Inquisitors, and guardian priests will be moving with you,” Father Jernihan informed.

Obviously, they weren’t going to come with me because it wasn’t realistic. Not only would it cost a ton of money to dispatch them, but it’d take them a long time to prepare.

Since they’d be moving in the name of the Vatican, they would also have to focus on my safety, and there would obviously be limitations to that.

They’d have to search the sick patients and be wary of the people nearby.

This wasn't something that could be done through willpower alone.

Normally, things weren't as exaggerated as this, but I was getting a lot of attention after the assassination attempt, so it was probably impossible for me to go out there. A crowd would surround the guards, and they'd have to be wary of ambushes.

In other words, I would be a nuisance by visiting the regions affected by a plague.

Father Jernihan didn't say that, but he clearly wanted me to read between the lines.

"You're saying that… I might be a nuisance," I said.

'I'm sad.'

"I-It's… nothing like that, Father Lee Ki-Young. Why would you say such a thing? I was s-simply… telling you about the potential issues," Father Jernihan denied.

I couldn't help but feel sad. How could something so sad happen to me?

"I'll do my best to come up with a way as soon as possible. I—"

"I completely understand what you're saying, Father Jernihan. I-It… looks like I made a troublesome request," I interrupted him.

When it came to method acting, one had to regulate one's emotions on a regular basis, so I forced myself to smile. I did this to show that I understood and accepted what Father Jernihan was trying to say.

"Don't worry about what I said, Father Jernihan," I told him.

"F-Father Lee Ki-Young," Father Jernihan stuttered.

'No, don't fall for it and just leave.'

"*Whoo…*"

'No, just leave.'

Thankfully, he bit his lips and bowed. He stood with determination as if telling me that there wasn't any room for negotiations, and I liked that determined side of his.

Obviously, I released a heavy sigh.

I was an incompetent saint. Everyone praised me, saying I was the Son of Light, but I realized that I was just a weak human being deep inside.

'Everything is my fault.'

Sadness filled me, and then I heard a voice outside.

"Father Lee Ki-Young."

"…"

"Father Lee Ki-Young?"

"Please tell him I don't want to see him today," I instructed.

"…"

"Actually, tell him I'm kind of tired today… *Sniff!*" I cried.

"Tell Templar Gen that I'm sorry…" I added.

"I'll deliver your message," the priest answered.

Father Lee Ki-Young would never cry… but there were times when I'd cry whenever I was alone.

'Ah, is there anyone who can heal my wound? My wound is only going to get worse if I don't do anything about it.'

'Is he going to leave me alone?'

I was sure the rumors had already spread, and it was possible that he was spying on me, but was he really not going to do anything about it?

I knew there was something he wanted from me.

'I'm at my lowest point right now, so how about you give it a shot?'

I was sure they had ordered them to do something against his will.

'You won't get a chance like this again.'

I looked at the sky with an empty gaze. Then, I started crying. Moments later, I sighed deeply and wiped away my tears.

I put on my sad face again and stared at the sky with listless eyes.

And that was when I heard knocking on the window…

"I'm sorry for visiting like you this," Gen said.

"Mister…" I paused. "Gen?"

I had to show him that I was surprised.

"How about we go for a walk?" Gen suggested.

I instantly saw through his intentions.

'You're about to become a criminal, man. Those capable of stealing an egg can steal an ox.'

As expected, it was always easy at first.

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1. Lee Ki-Young's POV ☜

CHAPTER 926
GEN (5)

"*Huh?* Where…" I asked.

"Come with me," Gen said. He definitely found me pitiful. He definitely found the Saint of Light, who was dealt a cruel hand by fate, to be quite pitiful, but aside from that, I had no idea what he was thinking.

Of course, I wasn't certain whether this current situation was an opportunity created by him, Templar Simon and Father Yohan, but Templar Gen needed to earn my favor. It honestly didn't matter, but it was pretty exciting to think that he was pitying me.

'He's too easy to lure in.'

However, who wouldn't find me pitiful? Everyone found me pitiful, but this criminal was the only one who had done anything about it so far; the ordinary people had never done anything about it.

Empathizing with me and actually offering me a helping hand were two completely different things.

As for him…

'I guess this is just how he is… '

I was not sure whether he was aware or not, but he was probably seeing himself in me.

He was raised in a temple at a young age, and he had been training to become a Templar since a young age, so I was sure he felt like his fate was decided the moment he was born.

He was probably thinking that he was living a blessed life because of his faith, but I wondered whether his subconscious thought the same as him or not.

Although he had been living a free life compared to the Saint of Light, I wonder if he *truly* felt free. The fact that he took pity on me instead of thinking that I was blessed because Benigoa had chosen me…

'Makes him look kind of suspicious.'

My assumption could be correct—he could be seeing himself in me, but…

'All of this could also be an act… '

Right now, the important thing was that this criminal was taking me outside.

"I-It's really late right now, and I don't want to wake the others up. I'm sorry…" I replied.

"That's not what I meant," Gen said.

'So you don't want to walk around the Vatican, right?'

"Mr. Gen, I'm sorry…" I apologized.

"I would like for you to come with me," Gen insisted.

At this point, I had to understand what he was saying.

Knocking on the window late at night was a rude thing to do. I told him that I didn't want any visits from him in the meantime, but he still decided to visit me and even suggested that we go on a walk.

I was the incredibly innocent Saint of Light, but I had to catch onto what he was trying to say.

My expression was blank, and I nodded unknowingly.

Then, I stood up as if I had been wanting to leave this suffocating place to feel the comfort of the world outside.

"It's cold outside," Gen said.

'So you're prepared for this… '

“It’s a little dirty, so please forgive me,” Gen told me.

A large blanket was wrapped around me, and I was sure he brought that blanket to hide my identity.

‘It’s definitely dirty.’

However, this much was necessary to hide my identity.

“Please forgive me for my rudeness,” Gen said. Then, he grabbed me with one hand and took me to the sky. I was sure he had gotten his wings later than me, but he was more skilled than me at flying. Of course, he wasn’t as fast as Kim Hyun-Sung.

Amidst the peeling scenery and the cacophonous breeze sweeping across us, I realized something important.

‘Won’t we get caught?’

I couldn’t help but think that we managed to get out a bit too easily.

‘I can just let Chang-Ryeol and Lian know… ‘

I was sure Gen had taken care of the Holy Knights and the guards.

Otherwise, he wouldn’t have taken me outside.

Just then, he stopped in midair. I lifted the dirty blanket slightly and was stunned by the night view of the Sacred Democratic Country. The city was illuminated by as many lights as there were stars shining in the night sky.

It was such a typical sight, but my eyes widened upon seeing it.

“Wow… it’s beautiful.”

It wasn’t *that* beautiful, but I had to say something.

“I agree,” Gen said.

“B-But… Mr. Gen… is this… really okay?” I asked.

“I don’t think so. Once the Holy Knights and the priests discover what I’ve done, they might do more than just scold me,” Gen replied.

“So… why…” I questioned.

“I just… wanted to do this,” Gen answered.

I just smirked and said a cliched line, “We’re… accomplices, then.”

“What?”

“Since we went out together, we’re accomplices. When should we go back?” I asked.

“We only have… about three hours…” Gen responded.

“That’s more than enough,” I commented.

I was free for the next three hours.

For the next three hours, there was no need for me to care about other people.

For the next three hours, I was freed from my suffocating bird cage.

I was temporarily free from my annoying shackles.

I started acting as if I had been locked up my entire life and revealed a genuine smile at Gen.

I was kind of annoyed by the fact that the blanket was kind of dirty, but I still smiled brightly. I needed to be energetic to show that I needed moments like *this.* I had to be excited and thrilled to the point that he’d think that I was having *too* much fun.

For the next three hours, I had to be curious about the world.

“Where are we going?” I asked.

“Wherever you want to go, Father Lee Ki-Young,” Gen answered.

“I don’t… really…” I mumbled.

“Then, let’s look around the night market first,” Gen suggested.

“The night market?” I repeated.

“Yes.”

It was a good choice.

Rather than going to an extremely safe place, he thought of a place where I could interact with the denizens. Moreover, I had never actually been to the capital’s night market.

I never really had any reason to visit it, as it was pretty far from the capital’s central district. Moreover, I couldn’t really visit such a crowded place due to my special identity.

“We have to walk from here,” Gen informed me.

“Okay!”

I couldn’t take my eyes off the various sights that I was seeing while we were walking to our destination. It wasn’t my first time seeing such sights, but I wasn’t used to seeing them. I was also not used to walking down the streets as my true self.

No one greeted me nor worshiped me.

Everyone was focused on their own business, but honestly…

‘I wish they would give me some attention.’

I had long gotten used to receiving attention, and I would always be happy whenever people were paying attention to me. Of course, I couldn’t make it *that* noticeable.

My steps became more and more confident as time passed. I couldn’t stop seeing many interesting things. I walked faster and faster down the street, and sometimes, I’d stop by a shop and stare curiously at the displayed items.

“Mr. Gen! Look at this!” I called him over.

“Okay.”

“What’s that?” I asked.

‘It’s just food that people normally eat. What else?’

“It looks like a ham made from the by-products of a lower-ranking monster. I heard monsters can be used to make food, and they apparently have a unique taste,” Gen replied.

“What? A monster…” I mumbled.

I was definitely raised like a noble. I had been living a rich life in the Blue Guild.

“Would you like to try?” Gen offered.

‘What? Are you crazy?’ I wanted to say this, but I couldn’t say it.

“Yes! Of course!” I answered happily.

I waited excitedly for Templar Gen to bring the mysterious dish over as if I was about to eat it for the first time.

“Here you go,” Gen said.

“Thank you…” I mumbled.

I looked a bit scared as I took a bite of the ham, but it tasted savory and wasn’t as bad as I thought. Unfortunately, it didn’t look appetizing, which made it difficult for me to swallow it.

‘Don’t back out now, Lee Ki-Young. If you do… ‘

“I-It’s delicious!” I stuttered.

“*Hahaha*,” Gen chuckled.

“It’s savory. This is—”

“Would you like another one?” Gen offered.

‘What?’

“Yes, please, Mr. Gen!” I responded.

‘You, criminal! I’m seriously going to kill you later.’

“*Ah!* Look at that, Mr. Gen. There’s a street performance,” I said, pointing at the commotion.

“Let’s head that way, then,” Gen said.

“Okay!”

“Rise! If you do, I’ll give you the future!”

“*Ah.*”

“Rise! My hero! If you do, I’ll give you the future!”

“…”

I knew what that performance was about even without watching it.

“Is the night market always this loud?” I asked.

“I’m not sure, as I’m not really a frequent visitor of the night market,” Gen replied.

“Hey, try this!”

“Take a look at the items! We sell low-grade potions!”

“We sell various tableware.”

“I sell wooden figures of Goddess Benigoa that I carved myself.”

“*Ah!*”

“I have wooden figures of the honorary cardinal as well. Would you like one?” a vendor asked.

“I’ll take the wooden figure of Goddess Benigoa…” I requested.

“Here you go,” the vendor said.

“I-I have to pay—”

I was dumbfounded because I had no idea how much was the wooden figure, and I also had no money with me. I thought perhaps I got a bit too carried away with my acting, but Gen approached me quietly and paid for the item before giving the wooden figure to me.

“Thank you, Mr. Gen,” I said.

I ran to a different place with the wooden statue in my arms. I looked at many different shops and marveled at the street performers. I eventually started blending in with the people. I saw drunk people and visited many different street shops. I was exaggerating my reactions and was even clapping sometimes.

I even got a henna tattoo on my wrist.

“Look at this, Mr. Gen,” I said.

“It looks good on you,” Gen complimented.

“I’ll have to wear a long sleeve tomorrow,” I said.

It wasn’t easy pretending to be happy. My legs were exhausted now, and I really wanted to go home and rest. Had three hours always been this long? Really? I had to wake up early tomorrow. Still, I needed to act like I was really happy so that he’d take me out next time.

‘I don’t want this to end.’

I was so happy that I could fly. I was certain that freedom felt like this.

Obviously, my happiness didn’t last long because Gen looked as if he was walking on thin ice.

My acting seemed to have lost its effectiveness on him, as he looked really worried.

However, I didn’t forget my role, and I knew better than anyone that this wasn’t where I was supposed to be. This freedom was temporary, and I appreciated the fact

that Gen had given me this fleeting freedom.

All I could do was lighten his burden, so I smiled brightly and asked, “Shall we… go back?”

Gen looked guilty as he nodded at me.

CHAPTER 927
GEN (6)

"Then… should we go back today too?" I asked.

"…"

'Gen still looks the same.'

It had been a few days since then, but his expression remained the same.

Just like the first day when we enjoyed our brief freedom, he was still staring at me as if I was pitiful.

He was trying his best to hide it, but it was clear that he couldn't stop pitying the life that I had been living so far. I had to force myself to act energetically because he'd either tighten his fist or talk less than usual.

Normally, it was more effective to show my bright side than my sad side because I was sure it was heartbreaking to see me act happily amidst the cruel hand that fate had dealt to me.

Even I felt emotional when I laughed off my circumstances and acted happily as if it was nothing.

'I got so immersed that I feel like crying as well.''

'Don't cry, Lee Ki-Young. Show your bright side. You're strong.'

'Don't cry… '

'You're being a nuisance to Mr. Gen. Smile. You're happy right now.'

"Thank you always, Mr. Gen," I said.

"What?"

“For bringing me out,” I told him.

“That’s…”

“The continent is vast,” I commented.

“*Huh?*”

“I mean, I knew it was vast, but I had no idea that there were still so many places out there that I hadn’t visited yet. The same goes for this place, where there are lively voices all throughout the night market, along with street performances. Who could have known that there are buildings by the river that people rarely visited?” I said.

“…”

“It’s a romantic place, and adventurers use it to rest, too. There are minstrels singing, adventurers form parties on the spot, and even adventurers sharing camps. Something about it is… truly heart-warming,” I added.

It was definitely unique.

I looked around and saw adventurers in groups.

I also saw abandoned buildings that looked like they were from ancient times, and there were also strange-looking buildings. I had no idea how the people from many years ago were using such buildings, but they had become camps that were protecting the adventurers of the current era.

Many low-ranking adventurers from all over the place frequented this place to talk about their hunt for the day while drinking rum.

Of course, they only seemed that way because I was staring at it from a romanticist’s point of view, but they actually looked like drunk homeless people. The abandoned buildings were dirty, there was trash everywhere, and there were items lying around.

‘Stop spitting on the floor, and don’t throw away your cigarettes to the floor, damn it.’

“I was an adventurer at some point, so I know just how difficult it is to cooperate with strangers in a party. Everyone will think of the others as enemies, and I was the same as them back then,” I said.

I was sure Gen knew that my stint as an adventurer didn't last that long, and it was definitely funny for me to pretend like I knew what it was like to be an adventurer. I was certain that it was funny because I saw Gen smiling quietly to himself.

"*Haha…"* Gen chuckled.

'It's true, Mr. Gen. I'm also a seasoned adventurer—"

"I'm sure you were," Gen interrupted me.

"…"

"*Haha…"*

And that was when I heard a voice behind me. "Hey, aren't you going to drink with us?"

"*Ah…"*

"We haven't prepared much, but you should join us here. I'm sure it was hard hunting with each other… Let's exchange information," the adventurer suggested.

"W-We…" I stuttered.

Obviously, I had to worry about Templar Gen. I wanted to spend time with them, but it was time to go home. I wanted to spend more time with them as Lee Ki-Young, not as the Saint of Light.

"Let's spend some time with them," Gen suggested.

"Can we?" I asked.

"Yes," Gen replied.

I got up shyly and joined the adventurers.

They handed me a used cup and poured out disgusting rum for me to drink. I knew they weren't sanitary, but I couldn't frown here.

Gen wasn't all that different, either. To ensure that there wouldn't be any accidents,

he sat next to me and accepted the drink quietly.

The drink wasn't poisoned.

"Where are you two from?" an adventurer asked.

"We're from Castlerock," Gen replied.

"You came from far away… Well, people like us don't really care about that kind of stuff. The present is what's important. Based on your equipment, were you two chased out of Castlerock?" another adventurer asked.

"Is this your first time here?" they asked.

"Yes. We heard there's a safe hunting ground here, so we traveled all the way here."

Gen, the potential criminal, answered for me.

We couldn't really talk about what we were going to say to these adventurers, so I had no choice but to listen to their conversation.

"You two look really close… You guys must've been in a party together for a long time…" an adventurer commented.

I had to answer this one.

"Yes. He's a really reliable person," I said.

"…"

"Having a reliable party member is a good thing," they said.

"H-He's actually my friend, not just a party member," I clarified.

'Are you touched? Yeah, we're friends. Even though it hasn't been that long since we met, we can still be considered friends. Yes, it hasn't been that long, but that makes this relationship of ours much more meaningful.'

'I wonder if I sounded rude.'

Fortunately, Gen smiled and nodded, so I smiled as well.

"…"

"You guys must have good teamwork. I wasn't really expecting a deep answer like that. I was just wondering if you'd be interested in hunting tomorrow…" the adventurer said.

"I'm sorry, but we have to return before morning," Gen said.

"You're leaving earlier than I thought. There's really no need to leave that early… Well, it can't be helped. Let's enjoy another cup of rum. Ham is perfect with this rum!" they shouted.

'Shit, don't give me that. It doesn't taste good. I guarantee this is the worst rum I have ever tasted.'

"Thank you very much for today as well, Mr. Gen," I said.

"It was nothing," Gen said.

"I'll see you tomorrow," I said.

"Okay."

It wasn't a bad event. It wasn't the decisive blow, but it was satisfactory.

I thought calling him my friend and a reliable person was the best part, but…

'We need more time.'

The only flaw was that I had no time to foster a nonexistent friendship with him. It would normally take a few months for such a friendship to be created, so I was truly short of time.

"Father Lee Ki-Young, it's me," Gen greeted.

"You're here," I said.

And that was why we needed to spend even more time with each other…

“Where are we going today?” I asked.

“I’m thinking about going outside the Sacred Democratic Country,” Gen replied.

“R-Really?” I asked.

We headed outside the Sacred Democratic Country.

“Mr. Gen! Watch out! Right now, I’m—*Ah!* Careful!” I shouted.

“It’s fine, Father Lee Ki-Young. I can take them on alone,” Gen reassured me.

“Mr. Gen! On your left!” I yelled.

“*Hah!*”

We took down the monsters that stood in our way.

“*Heuk… heuk…”* I cried.

“Father Lee Ki-Young…” Gen mumbled.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry,” I repeated.

“I think they died long before we got here. It’s not your fault,” Gen said.

“But… if we had arrived just a bit faster… if we had just been a bit faster… they wouldn’t have to die,” I mumbled.

“…”

We even met people who had become unfortunate victims of the world’s evil. Naturally, our friendship grew deeper as we went on more adventures. Of course, I needed to put a ton of effort into each event since we were short on time.

“Mr. Gen!” I shouted.

“Father Lee Ki-Young.”

There were no ordinary events because that was the life of a protagonist. We were

like detectives who'd bring mysterious cases with them wherever they went because Gen and I encountered many different incidents at the places that we visited.

"These are followers from the other order," Gen said.

"H-How!" I shouted.

"It's fine. They probably won't recognize you. I'll put more effort into your disguise tomorrow," he said.

I encountered priests from other orders…

"Mr. Gen, are we leaving today as well?" I asked.

"Yes," Gen answered.

"Where are we going today?" I asked.

"I prepared a boat," Gen responded.

"What?"

Sometimes, we'd travel by sea.

"Pirates! There are pirates, Mr. Gen!" I shouted.

"I'm Gol P. Roger[1], the Pirate King! *Hahaha!*"

"*Ah!*"

"Watch out, Mr. Gen!" I yelled.

Sometimes, we'd encounter enemies that were a threat even to us.

Our unclear friendship was starting to take shape, and a fake bond was slowly forming between us. We'd go out on a stroll after our work for the day, and we had been doing that so often that it was second nature to us at this point. Sometimes, we'd stay up all night to talk about our next adventures, and sometimes, we'd meet in the afternoon instead of at night.

The atmosphere within the Vatican was still tense, but I had to spend time with him while looking out for Father Basel.

Gen and I had a special memory together, and it was our memory of looking up at the sky together.

“It’s a beautiful sight,” I commented.

Everyone would fall in love with this sight.

“It’s so beautiful that it’s blinding. It’s Goddess Benigoa’s gift. I should offer a prayer of thanks…” I said.

“Yes… I’m sure Goddess Benigoa will be happy as well, Father Lee Ki-Young,” Gen agreed.

I couldn’t peer into his mind, but I was sure he was thinking about it.

He was thinking about showing me even more sights instead of returning me to my suffocating cage in the Vatican. He wanted me to fly in the bright sky of the continent; he didn’t want me to stay in the pitch-black abyss where I couldn’t see anything at all.

He didn’t have the courage to do it, but he’d offer a helping hand if he truly considered me his equal. Of course, he needed an opportunity to do so.

Normally, the turning point was always in the middle of a conflict, and I also thought that there had to be a conflict sooner rather than later.

We looked happy, but it wasn’t really the case.

‘Damn it. The world is trying to split us up.’

There was something Gen wanted from me as well, so I could say that he had been using his sincerity to win me over. He was aware of that as well, which was why he hadn’t said a word about the faction war in the Vatican.

However, if he wasn’t going to say it first, then I’d say it first.

And just like that, the potential criminal knocked on the window at the usual time

and cautiously entered my room.

I cast an empty gaze at him as I handed over the stacked documents to him.

I had to mention the truth to the villain who had taken advantage of the Saint of Light's innocent heart.

"Was it all because of this?"

'One hour and twenty-five minutes left before Gen becomes a criminal… '

"Was it all… because of this?! Was this the reason you've been trying to gain my favor?! Did you do all that… just for this?!" I roared.

'One hour and twenty-four minutes left before Gen becomes a criminal… '

"Tell me! Say something! Templar Gen!" I yelled.

A close friend had stabbed me in the back. I was in so much despair that I couldn't hold back my tears.

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1. A parody of Gol D. Roger from One Piece ☜

CHAPTER 928
GEN (7)

Naturally, my memories with Templar Gen popped up in my head.

We had made a ton of memories in a short period of time, so the betrayal was extremely painful. He was… the only person who approached the Saint of Light when there was no one else around him.

He was the one who had seen me as who I was rather than as the God of Sacrifice and Revival or the Honorary Cardinal of the Vatican. He became the lighthouse that guided me whenever I was weary.

The relationship I had with Templar Gen was deeper and more meaningful than what people could see. Based on the script, Templar Gen was my way out of my painful life, and he was the savior who had helped me get through tough days.

As the lonely honorary cardinal, I thought he and I were alike.

We cherished our own faith; we enjoyed adventures; we met new people, and we enjoyed the sights that the continent had to offer to us.

Despite knowing that we were fated to live by the card that fate had dealt to us, we still cherished every single moment that fate had given to us. That was why I thought we were alike. I thought he'd understand me, as he became a Templar as soon as he was born.

'That was the script.'

No, I thought… we understood each other, but the document that I had just stumbled upon changed my mind. The document contained details on using the faction war within the Vatican and the honorary cardinal.

Of course, my dumb and foolish self had yet to fully read the document, but he didn't have to do that, as he was going to rip it apart, anyway.

Tears flowed down my eyes like a waterfall as I threw away the items in my hands. I trusted him a lot, so I truly felt betrayed. Of course, my actions could also be born from the recent habit that I had nurtured. I was talking about my habit of wearing my heart on my sleeve before him.

I looked so sad that I couldn't describe this emotion that surprised even myself.

'I feel like my heart is going to explode if I don't do this.'

"*Eek!*" I cried out, making a sound that was supposed to be exclusive to Jung Ha-Yan. Then, I crumpled the document and threw it to the ground. *'Shit, my emotions are important right now.'*

"Tell me!" I shouted.

I had to show him that I still trusted him and that I didn't want to lose him. Although he had already betrayed me, I had to look sad… like I couldn't accept the truth. I even looked desperate and pitiful.

'Please give me some kind of excuse.'

"…"

'Tell me there was a good reason for this. Tell me you didn't build a bond with me because of this.'

"Was it… Was it really because of this?" I questioned.

'Say something, anything, you fool.'

However, the idiot before me couldn't give me any excuses. He was quiet, but he looked like he had eaten something disgusting. Obviously, I cheered because it was a sign that he had actually fallen for it.

His intentions at first were different. According to the mysterious document, there was a chance that he simply wanted to win my favor. However, he changed slowly as we spent more time together.

He ended up enjoying his time with the pitiful Saint of Light more than fulfilling his original goal.

'I'm acting pretty desperate.'

The insignificant little adventure had made me so happy that I had completely forgotten about the other problems that were giving me a headache.

I saw Gen—not Templar Gen, looking at me as just Lee Ki-Young.

We ended up having a bond that wasn't part of his plan.

'It's making me cry.'

The potential criminal looked just as horrible as me, and he despised himself deeply. I wanted to say something, but he seemed to be thinking that he had no right to give an excuse. A frown soon suffused his face, and I assumed it was because he thought his silence was enough of an answer.

"It's… true," I mumbled.

"…"

"*Ha… haha…* It really is true. Your goal was to use me in this fight among the factions," I said.

"I'm sorry," Gen said.

I was having so much fun that I couldn't focus at all.

"What were you trying to do, Templar Gen?" I asked.

"…"

"What the hell were you trying to do in the Vatican? I… I… What the hell was your…"

I couldn't finish my sentence.

"W-What have I… been doing…" I muttered.

'My head was filled with the pain of betrayal and despair. How can I think straight at a time like this?'

I staggered upon getting hit by a sudden bout of dizziness.

I started gasping for breath; I was having a hard time breathing.

“Father Lee Ki-Young…” Gen said.

“Don’t come close to me,” I warned him.

“…”

“You are a stranger to me,” I said.

‘That’s such a memorable line.’

“I-I’ll pretend I didn’t see this,” I told Gen.

‘Stages of denial… ‘

“W-We never met in the first place,” I stuttered.

“Are you—”

“Don’t show up before me,” I said.

“…”

“Don’t appear in front of me ever again. I-I’m going to go… pray. Goddess Benigoa…” I paused.

“…”

‘Let’s act like our encounter with Pirate King Gol P. Roger, our fight against multiple monsters, and the drinks we shared at that camp had never happened in the first place.

‘Let’s abandon the bond that we had built between us.

‘I’ll lock up Lee Ki-Young again and return to being the Saint of Light as well as the Honorary Cardinal of the Vatican. I’ll return to the saint who loved all mankind so much that he had once sacrificed everything for them. I’ll live the life I’ve been living so far.’

'Yeah, I got my hopes up too much.'

There was no way someone out there could truly understand the real Lee Ki-Young.

There wasn't a person alive… who could see me as Lee Ki-Young rather than as the Saint of Light.

'But is this really okay? Is it really okay to pretend like nothing had happened between us?'

"But… I—"

"Please leave. If you don't, I'll call someone," I threatened him.

'Is it really okay for me to abandon my true self? Is that really the right choice?'

'What is this guy doing?'

Say something.

'You're really going to let it end like this? You're not actually going to leave, are you?'

'Haa… you slow-witted fool.'

"What are you doing?! Templar Gen! Didn't you hear what I said?" I shouted.

'Say something, damn it. I'm ready to accept everything.'

"*Eek!*"

Ha-Yan's scream!

"That may have been the case at first, Father Lee Ki-Young," Gen said.

"…"

"At first… I may have approached you with that kind of intent," Gen continued.

"What… are you saying—"

“However, that wasn’t the only reason,” he interrupted me.

‘What? Is that true?’

“Don’t make me laugh,” I said.

“I’m not sure when it started. Actually… it’s possible that I was seeing myself in you from the very beginning. I could’ve been looking for my true self that I had lost—no, my true self that I never had,” Gen explained.

‘Really? Is that true?’

“I wasn’t just pitying you,” Gen added.

‘So the fake bond I created wasn’t fake? The fake bond I created was real to you?’

“I’m well aware that whatever I say isn’t good enough to be an excuse,” Gen said.

“No, it’ll be a good excuse. I’m more than willing to accept your excuse as long as you make the right choice.’

However, I needed to say something different in order to get what I wanted.

“Are you trying to insult me? Templar Gen! Don’t think you can justify your actions with those words. I… I trusted you. I thought you were a good man and someone I can trust…

“Did you enjoy it? Did you think… I was a fool… a naive person who’s easy to trick? I’m sure you were happy fooling me!” I retorted.

“T-That’s not true!” Gen exclaimed, denying it.

‘You fool… You’re the naive person who’s easy to trick.’

“That’s really not the case,” he said.

“Then…”

“I swear on Goddess Benigoa that I never thought that way. I-I respect you. I really… really respect you. I’ve always found you admirable for how you had sacrificed

everything you had for the continent and the Goddess," Gen confessed.

"…"

"However, my respect for you goes beyond that. I admire you for giving up your true self and living as the Saint of Light and the Honorary Cardinal. I admire you for choosing to live as the God of Sacrifice and Revival. I-I wouldn't dare think… that you're a fool or a naive person who's easy to trick," Gen explained.

'Look at his reaction. He's so… clumsy.'

"The memories and bond that we had built together weren't lies. My intention may have been impure, but the time we had spent together wasn't meaningless," Gen continued.

'I'll show him that I'm hesitating.'

I decided to make just one informal comment before immediately backing off.

It would be a sign that I had accepted his words as Lee Ki-Young.

"Don't make me laugh."

"The time we spent drinking rum and traveling the continent wasn't… meaningless," Gen added.

"D-Don't make me laugh! Templar Gen!" I shouted.

'Man, he's not bad… '

Unfortunately, it wouldn't be that easy for him to become a criminal.

I was pretty stubborn, and my honorary cardinal self would never be convinced of him.

"I don't want to think that those times were meaningless," Gen said.

"What are you—"

"I'm going to take you with me," Gen said. He calmly revealed his plan to commit a

crime. He babbled on about his plan to commit a terrible crime without blinking an eye.

He looked like a psychopath, and I couldn't help but tremble in fear.

"You've sacrificed too much, Father Lee Ki-Young. I'm sure the continent… the Sacred Democratic Country… and Goddess Benigoa want you to be free.

"I thought I was bestowed this blessing to fight my enemies. I foolishly… thought… that was the reason why I got these wings," Gen explained.

'You disgusting monster.'

"However, I don't think that was the case, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. I probably needed these wings… to take you to more places and show you the new continent," Gen said.

'You criminal.'

"You can show your true self now. You don't need to sacrifice yourself anymore, nor do you need to keep wearing clothes that don't fit you at all," Gen added.

'So you're going to tie up the Saint of Light using that smelly and dirty blanket?'

"An adventure…" Gen trailed off.

"…"

"It's time to go on a long adventure, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," Gen continued.

I was scared, and I was trembling like an aspen tree.

'Save me… S-Someone. Hyung-Sung… Ha-Yan… Deok-Gu… '

This was the worst, but my life could be in danger if I rejected him, so I-I had no choice but to grab his hand.

CHAPTER 929
GEN (8)

'Adventure, my ass.'

"Is it… really okay to do this?" I asked.

"Yes…" Gen answered.

"Is it really… okay to live this way?" I questioned.

"Yes, it'll be fine," Gen replied.

"I'm scared, Mr. Gen. I don't know if this is even forgivable and if Goddess Benigoa will really allow this… More importantly, is it really okay to abandon the continent… at a time like this?" I asked, sounding hesitant.

"You've sacrificed too many things, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. Your existence is the reason the current continent still exists, and it's because of you that the Sacred Democratic Country managed to take that one step forward.

"You don't need to think about other people all the time. I want you to enjoy the things that will help you find your true self," Gen explained.

'He's talking so smoothly. You unprepared fool… It would have been great if you had made your plan just as smooth as your talking… '

"But…"

"Would you like some more?" Gen asked.

"I-I'm okay," I declined.

'Go ahead and stuff your face in that pig porridge.'

It had been exactly six hours since I was kidnapped by this criminal.

“Where exactly are we?” I asked.

“We’re in the Demonic Forest of Laios,” Gen answered.

“*Ah!* So we’re in Laios?” I replied.

“That’s right.”

“I’ve visited Laios a few times before… but it’s my first time here,” I told him.

We slept outdoors inside the Demonic Forest of Laios, and this was our first morning together. Gen served me porridge that I would never eat if I had the chance.

Perhaps it was because of the crude bed last night, but my back was hurting. I knew I’d experience some hardships, but the treatment I was receiving was worse than I expected.

Obviously, there was no way this dumb fool had planned things out properly. I understood that he didn’t have time to pack some necessities, as getting out of the Vatican was already a difficult task, but this was worse than I thought.

‘How much does he have?’

He had at least a thousand gold coins, right?

I suddenly missed Rafael’s cozy mobile home when I saw the shabby and crude temporary. It was a good thing he was serving me meat for all three of our meals.

When I was first captured, he even served me a Mirror Salmon as a side dish, but I didn’t eat it because… my pride hadn’t allowed me to eat it.

However, I really couldn’t eat this thing. I really hope we were not going to eat this every meal. And what if we had to stay in a single place for an extended period of time? I was worried that we’d keep on sleeping like this. Shouldn’t he make a bed, at the very least?

“Is the food not to your liking?” Gen asked.

“Of course not. You cooked this yourself. I just… have many things on my mind…” I answered.

"…"

"It looks like we'll have to walk to the nearby small town, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," Gen informed.

"What?"

'What did this idiot just say?'

"There could be a party after us. Flying… will be dangerous for many reasons," Gen said.

"I-I see," I stuttered.

'I think I know why he told me to eat more.'

I frowned, and Gen became cautious after seeing my expression. However, he felt better when I smiled brightly the next second. He seemed to be thinking that I was still struggling about whether my true self was Saint of Light or Lee Ki-Young.

"I see. So we're really… on an adventure… now…" I mumbled.

"That's right," Gen said.

"I should eat more to get more energetic, then," I said.

I shook my clenched fists and forced that pig porridge down my throat again.

Gen smiled warmly and started cleaning up the temporary camp. He seemed to have handled many missions by himself, as he looked like he had long gotten used to setting up camp.

Was he looking forward to our future travels? His warm smile left an impression on me.

'Haa… damn it. I'm annoyed.'

'I haven't washed up yet, and Laios was such a dirty place. How can I walk there when I'm so dirty? And I really don't want to eat this porridge, either.

‘Is wiping your face with a wet wipe even considered washing up?

‘My feet, back, and knees were in pain. Adventure, my ass… ‘

“Our plan is to go to a nearby town and resupply before heading for the Republic,” Gen said.

“The Republic? Why…” I asked.

“I heard there’s a pretty famous city there. Adventurers normally gather there, and we should be able to obtain new identities there. I also brought some gold coins with me,” Gen replied.

“How much…” I asked.

“Sixty pieces,” Gen answered.

‘Ha… shit… ‘

‘He’s really ignorant of the world. Do you really think that’s enough?’

“A new identity… So I can truly become the person I’ve always wanted to be,” I said.

“That’s right. We’ll go ahead and register with an adventure guild, and then we can finally go on dungeon raids or accept commissions from all over the continent. We can go out to sea… or go to all the cities and interesting places you want to visit.

“It’s going to be kind of difficult, but they’re all going to be memorable experiences,” Gen explained.

“Wow…” I mumbled.

“You must be excited just thinking about it, right?” Gen asked.

‘I’m so excited that I want to kill you. When can I wash up? Actually, are you sure we can stock up at the nearest town from herey? Have you not considered the fact that there might be a ton of people there that might recognize me?’

Moreover, I also believed that it was starting.

If my assumption was right, we wouldn't even make it to the nearest city.

'Anyway, we're in Laios, so can't you just take this blanket away from me?'

"It's a beautiful sight. Don't you agree?" Gen asked.

"…"

The criminal was staring at the sky, and he wanted me to empathize with him, but I wasn't looking at him.

'Soon… '

Through my telescope, I saw a few priests knocking on the door to my room in the Vatican. Obviously, there was no sound inside the room. The priests looked confused, but they started knocking again.

Their confusion was understandable, as this had never happened before.

I was always following the rules. I had never made the priests wait for a long time, and I'd always greet them with a neat look.

One of the priests called out to me, but they received no answers.

After talking to the holy knights who were guarding the door, they knocked again, but they still received no answer. With that, one of the priests ran away somewhere. After a while, Father Jernihan arrived.

- Father Lee Ki-Young.

Huh?

- It's me, Father Jernihan.

'Hurry up and come in.'

- Father Lee Ki-Young! It's Father Jernihan.

Father Jernihan looked anxious.

- I’m coming in.

Boom!

A holy knight destroyed the door.

- *Ah… ahhh…*

They were instantly stupefied upon entering the room.

The room was in a mess, as I had gathered my things in a hurry, and there were traces of a break-in, so I was sure they’d find it difficult to deduce just what exactly had transpired.

The holy knights standing guard at the door looked like they had stopped breathing; their eyes went as wide as saucers. Clearly, they had never expected to see such a sight. Eventually, they snapped back to their senses and hurriedly searched the room.

There were traces of someone leaving through the window, a fierce argument, and resistance. Father Jernihan swept his gaze across the room that looked like a scene of a crime.

‘There’s a reason why I ripped that document.’

I felt kind of bad because Father Jernihan’s hands were trembling as he was slowly putting the pieces of paper together. However, the look of despair on his face convinced me that I had done a great job at setting the bait.

- Father Jernihan…

- S-Something…

- This letter was found in Father Lee Ki-Young’s drawer. I believe he had left it for you…

It was a letter with all sorts of details written on it.

It mentioned that Templar Gen was suspicious and that Father Yohan could be after me.

The letter also said that if I ended up disappearing, my disappearance could be a part of their plan to protect Goddess Benigoa. I also strongly suggested that they could be the mastermind behind the recent incident.

They were truths I had to keep hidden deep within myself, as I couldn't tell anyone else about them. They were heartbreaking truths that I had to endure myself for the peace of the Order of the Benigoa.

- Yohan… Father Yohan… Father Yohan!!! That bastard! Those bastards!!!

-…

- Summon the Heretic Inquisitors right now! Holy Knights… Holy Knights! Deliver this document to Father Basel right now and request reinforcements!

A certain someone's beard was trembling violently.

- *Ahh…* What… What should we do about this… O Benigoa… O Benigoa…

The evidence was right in front of him, so he responded quickly.

He had no reason to hesitate as well.

- Father Yohan!

- What are you all doing?! He's praying right now! If you have business with him…

- Quiet! You beasts! I know everything that you guys have done!

- We're in a holy temple! How dare you unsheathe your weapon! You're standing before Goddess Benigoa, Father Jernihan!

- Goddess Benigoa will punish all of you, you dirty fools! The wrath of the goddess will fall on you! What are you all doing?! I want the Heretic Inquisitors to drag those dirty fools out right now! Sister Helena! I want the Holy Knights to look for Father Lee Ki-Young right now! Hurry! We're running out of time!

- *Ahhh!*

- What are you all doing right now?! How dare you unsheathe your sword! We—

- Silence, you heretics! How can you call yourselves followers of the Goddess Benigoa when you're trying to harm her son?! Drag Father Yohan out of here! No mercy to those who resist!

- *Ahhhhhh!* Goddess Benigoa! Goddess Benigoa!!!

- How dare you say her name with that dirty mouth of yours! You're maggots who deserve to be in hell!

- Help… help…!

- Don't show mercy to those heretics!

The temple immediately became chaotic. Troops arrived, and priests covered in blood were being dragged away. Everyone was still trying to figure out what was going on amidst the nonstop screaming.

The troops who reached Father Yohan's study knocked on the door using holy magic.

- Templar… Simon! Mr. Simon!

'I'm sure he had already cut ties with him. He needs to ensure his survival, too. He's probably stuck in a dungeon or in hiding somewhere.'

- Let go of me! D-Do you know who you're touching right now?

- Silence! You dirty heretic! Where's Father Lee Ki-Young?

- W-What… are you talking about…

- I know you tried to harm him.

- What are you talking about?! Father Jernihan! I really… really don't know anything.

- What? Stop talking without thinking!

- I said I don't know anything! Father Jernihan! There's something… strange about this…

- What?

- I don’t know anything! Someone’s behind this! Someone—

- Destroy that heretic’s hand!

- *Ahhhhhh!* Simon! Templar! Simon! *Ahhhh!* I really don’t know anything!

It was music to my ears.

Meanwhile, the guy next to me mumbled once again with his gaze fixed on the sky.

He was smiling and was reading my expression like he was demanding an answer from me.

“Isn’t it a *really* beautiful sight?” Gen asked.

Obviously, I had to answer.

“Yes, it really is.”

- The Templars… I’m sure it’s the Templars.

“It’s just as beautiful as our future adventures, Mr. Gen,” I added.

- Templar Simon… Wait, where’s Templar Gen?

He was right here with me.

CHAPTER 930
GEN (9)

The Sacred Democratic Country and the Vatican weren't incompetent, so they reacted pretty fast.

It seemed that the note I left had caused chaos within the Vatican.

The chaos was so intense that the ongoing faction war within the Vatican looked pitiful in comparison to it.

Father Yohan and the heretics were having a fun time in the interrogation rooms.

Everyone involved was being interrogated, so even the priests working with the Templars were popping up as well. I wouldn't be surprised if Goddess Benigoa's holy mace ended up smashing their heads in.

- *Ahhh! Ack!*

- Father Lee Ki-Young…

Naturally, they realized that the recent incident and the monsters capable of wielding holy power were related to my disappearance. With those clues in mind, they focused on the Templars, who were still hiding.

The honorary cardinal's note contained a heavy and cruel truth that I had decided to keep to myself. As expected, the note was pretty useful, and the stories I said only to Father Basel were being investigated as well.

I was talking about the scenes I had seen in my dreams where Goddess Benigoa was locked up in a dark space while being surrounded by demons who were busy drinking her blood.

It was a dark and dirty truth. The disgusting truth that was supposed to have been hidden forever was starting to come to light.

- That's what Father Lee Ki-Young said to me…

- No way… Is that really possible? O Benigoa… O Benigoa…

Father Basel's words and my note weren't the only things that supported their assumption.

'Didn't we work hard on our investigation?'

Holy Sword Rafael and his party's investigation were pretty useful as well.

I was sure that if we revealed the information that the mini Outer Gods had uncovered from their investigation, the entire thing would become a bigger conspiracy. It could no longer stay as an ordinary kidnapping case.

Actually, it wasn't just a conspiracy. It was the truth, and it had already happened.

- According to Mr. Rafael's investigations, the strange monsters had evolved because they had consumed Goddess Benigoa's holy blood…

- That's the same for the Templars!

- They presume that a dungeon was made as a result of the anomaly. Miss Jo Hye-Jin of the Blue Guild had mentioned that this incident was caused by a dungeon that they have yet to clear. I also received documents from Mr. Rafael's party. Father Lee Ki-Young's baby angels… have delivered those documents themselves.

- Where the heck is that dungeon?

- Are you sure… Father Lee Ki-Young is in that dungeon?

- We're not sure yet… but we believe that Templar Gen has kidnapped Father Lee Ki-Young…

- So what's the point of this conversation, then?! We must figure out Father Lee Ki-Young's whereabouts before anything else!

They were bound to find out that Templar Gen was my kidnapper, as there was no such thing as secrets in this world.

They'd figure out that Templar Gen had been taking me out late at night.

Father Yohan's priests and the Holy Knights had been overlooking our meeting, and the guys who were paid to spread rumors were having a field day at the moment.

The rumor was definitely about a heartwarming story—a heartwarming story about how I wanted to trust Templar Gen until the end and how I had given him a ton of my love.

Unfortunately, Templar Gen repaid my trust and love with a criminal act, so he deserved to die. He also deserved to become the continent's public enemy number one.

- The recent event is related to this. Just think about their actual goal. They had obtained the *wrong* power by drinking Goddess Benigoa's holy blood. Why would they not want to drink the Saint of Light's blood?

- How terrible… O Benigoa…

- What should we do about this?

They reexamined Gen's motives for kidnapping me, and the public opinion changed in an instant. Thanks to the rumors that Ji-Hye noona had been spreading all this while, the evil guys and the good guys quickly became clear to everyone.

Moreover, the rumors justified the decisions of the good guys.

They had to move forward with their plan, and they couldn't waste any time being nitpicky.

- We can't find any traces of the remaining Templars.

- They might be hiding somewhere inside the Vatican.

- In that case, the dungeon might be inside the Vatican as well. We must search the Vatican, even if it means getting outside help.

- The Templars… have been too secretive and independent. We must use this opportunity and completely get rid of all the corrupted beings in the Vatican.

Everyone was working together during this unprecedented crisis. The Holy Knights and the Inspection Bureau of the Sacred Democratic Country rushed to the Vatican in order to get rid of the corrupted heretics.

The winds of unprecedented change were bringing with it a brand-new order.

It probably wouldn't take long. The Vatican was big. It was as big as a small city, but I was convinced that it was only a matter of time before they found what they were looking for, especially if they investigated the places where the Templars were often spotted.

Ah! They could get more information from Father Yohan.

- I… I know nothing, Sister Helena.

-…

- I really don't know anything.

-…

- Everything is Templar Simon's fault. H-He's the reason behind all this! A-After receiving Goddess Benigoa's new will and light… h-he used that sly tongue of his to deceive me—no, us. If I made any mistakes, it's the mistake of loving Goddess Benigoa—*AAAHHH!*

- Where's Father Lee Ki-Young, you dirty heretic?!

- I'm not… a heretic… I…

- You harmed him, so Goddess Benigoa will never love you. What you're going to see upon closing your eyes isn't Goddess Benigoa, but the dissection table that she had made for you.

- That's not true. That's not true…

Sister Helena was pretty scary.

It seemed that they wouldn't be able to extract that much information from Father Yohan. It was clear that Templar Simon was the one controlling him rather than the

other way around.

The fact that there were many things happening at the Vatican at the same time made me feel relieved. It was like the puzzle pieces that I had been collecting were finally falling into place. I was proud of my friends, who were getting closer and closer to the truth thanks to the information that we had painstakingly gathered.

- Father Lee Ki-Young has instructed us not to let the continent know if something ends up happening to him. He warned us to be especially careful around Miss Jung Ha-Yan and Mr. Kim Hyun-Sung.

- I understand how he feels. He doesn't want them to worry. Father Lee Ki-Young has always thought about others before himself. I just didn't think that he'd still prioritize other people despite his current predicament.

- I'm sure he's worried about the possibility that the denizens might get swayed.

- We have to take this. I contacted the nations nearby, but I'm not sure how helpful they are going to be.

- The rangers in the Sacred Democratic Country, the Blue Guild members, and our Holy Knights are tracking him, so I'm sure we'll be able to save him.

- We just distributed Templar Gen's wanted posters.

- The Continental Protection Management Committee is moving along the border between Laios and the Union. We've been continuously deploying griffon units and with the help of the Black Swan Guild, we've been controlling the guild getting intel.

- Our command center believes that Templar Gen is moving around by flying. We've been keeping an eye on the nearby region using the surveillance orbs…

- We've dispatched rangers based on witness accounts. Apparently, some people saw them in specific locations.

They were even going at it systematically. It'd be annoying if Ha-Yan and Kim Hyun-Sung ended up getting involved. I also wanted to avoid the denizens finding out about this because those two would definitely end up hearing about this incident.

The Sacred Democratic Country and the Holy Knights were working together to close

in on us, and the griffon units were either flying or were moving discreetly on the ground.

There wasn't any problem—no, wait, there was one problem. I was getting tired.

"I think it's best if we don't stop by the closest city, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," Gen suggested.

"What? What about our supplies…" I asked.

'And I need a shower.'

What about a hotel?

"Can we not meet the denizens of the small city?" I asked.

Was there really no way for us to escape from this homeless life?

"We still have food I brought with me… and I can make food myself…" Gen answered.

'Are you suggesting that we're going to eat nothing but ham from now on?'

"W-Why should we not stop by the closest city?" I asked, sounding doubtful.

"I believe they're closing in on us, and I also think they're focusing on this area for their search… We should just stay hidden here for a few days, and then we can leave once it's no longer so hot around here," Gen suggested.

"D-Did I put you in a difficult spot…" I questioned.

"It's nothing like that, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. It's just—"

"So you expected this, Mr. Gen. W-Wouldn't… it be better if we just returned?" I asked.

'Let's go back, please. If you don't have a plan, let's just surrender instead of wasting time like this.'

"If something happens to you because of me…" I paused.

"It's fine," Gen said.

“I don’t think I can—”

“I’ll be fine,” Gen repeated, interrupting me.

‘I won’t be fine, though.’

“I-I’ll be fine, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. I promised you that I’d show you a better world,” Gen said.

‘This isn’t a better world. It’s just going to be for a few days, but how can we live like this? How long do you think we can hold out… inside these ruins while eating nothing but pig porridge? We can’t resupply, and we have nothing. Is porridge all we’re going to have? Wait, can we even wash up?’

“We’ll overcome every single hardship as long as we’re together,” Gen reassured.

‘No, I can’t endure this. The power of our bond and friendship can’t sustain us. Now, it’s about capital and competence. I once said not to look at incompetent fools, but that’s exactly what you are—incompetent.’

“I agree. It’ll be hard… but with you, I can endure any hardships. However, I don’t want you to get hurt because of things like this, Mr. Gen,” I told him.

‘So let’s just surrender… ‘

“There’s a lake nearby,” Gen informed me.

Stop changing the subject.

“I’ll go get some water,” Gen said.

‘Get water? Are we that low on supplies? Is there hot water? What about a foaming cleansing cream? Shampoo?’

“I’ll prepare warm water for you, so please rest,” Gen told me.

“But Mr. Gen—”

“We can get through this together, Mr. Lee Ki-Young,” Gen interrupted me.

'I can't get through this, damn it. This trip was a bad idea.'

'Is he planning on spending time like this until we get new identities?'

We could hunt down monsters, but there was no way for us to sell those carcasses. The small cities were under surveillance because they were investigating this region right now. In other words, we had to stay here for a few more days. We couldn't go back to the city to stock up on supplies.

'How much food do we have left?'

I searched his bag and found that…

'He didn't bring much food.'

Perhaps he couldn't prepare much, as we had left in such a hurry, or perhaps he thought that he could resolve everything by himself?

'Three days?'

The pieces of jerky he had put into that disgusting pig porridge would only last for three days.

'The coffee doesn't taste good, either.'

And I wouldn't be able to drink coffee by tomorrow…

I believed he had a conscience, so he'd give the rest to me, right?

'They'll find us soon… '

'There's no warm milk, no wine, no snacks, and no tea.'

Sixty gold coins were truly all he had, and I couldn't help but sigh when I thought about where he could even spend this money.

Unfortunately for him, the Sacred Democratic Country wasn't incompetent. It was highly likely that they'd find and rescue us without asking for Lee Ji-Hye or Jung Ha-Yan's help.

If possible, I wanted to avoid any awkward situations.

'I just need to hold out a bit longer.'

The Sacred Democratic Country was competent, so everything would surely be resolved in just a week. The wicked criminal would be judged by the law by then, and I'd be able to return to the arms of my beloved denizens.

And just like that, two weeks passed by in a flash…

'Damn it.'

CHAPTER 931
GEN (10)

- Save me, Ji-Hye noona.

- I'm busy right now, too. You might as well enjoy your suffering while you're out there. The more you suffer, the more heated things are going to become here. Isn't that what you wanted?

-…

- The public has turned their backs on the Vatican, and the reformation of the Vatican is going smoothly. I'm telling you, things have never been better. They're on their toes, and the dungeon might soon be discovered.

- Are you sure it's not because you want to see me suffer?

- No way. Do you really think that I want you to suffer?

You're the only person I think about all day. I've been wondering if you're eating properly, sleeping in a warm place, and bathing properly.

- But what can you do? This situation needs to last longer so that we'll reap a ton of profit. More importantly, we're getting so much holy power right now.

The priests are praying a lot more these days, and they're more sincere than usual as well. Benigoa is screaming in joy up above. Moreover, we also have to get ready for our business.

- Hold on.

- We need to get as much holy power as we can right now so we will have no regrets later. If we want to afford the project that our Commander Jin is preparing, we need to get as much holy power as we can right now.

- You already gave him a project?

- The continent is safe right now *because* he's there. Kim Hyun-Sung is an idiot, but he's not slow-witted. Commander Jin, who's working hard both emotionally and mentally, needs to be rewarded so that his work efficiency will increase.

- Also, the project isn't *that* bad. I can't tell you right now, though…

- What would a rookie know? Noona, stop trying to side with him when talking to me… It makes me uncomfortable.

- I'm always on your side, but he's pretty competent. He gets his tasks done while taking care of Kim Hyun-Sung, and whenever he has free time, he brings me a new project, so how can I not like him? *Ah!* Are you jealous?

'Jealous, my ass.'

- I didn't know you were the type to get jealous. You're so cute. Don't worry. He's competent, but he looks like an asshole, so he's not my type.

- That's true.

- I just can't describe his annoying look. Especially when he submits a project, he becomes so sassy that I just want to pick on him. He knows that he's competent, and he makes it very clear. That's why he's annoying. I'm sure he was part of the upper-class society when he was back on Earth.

-…

- *Ah*, is Templar Gen or whatever treating you well?

- He is, but that's the problem. He's not flexible. Anyway, I can't stand it any longer. At this rate, I might actually call Ha-Yan, noona.

- Then try calling her… Anyway, that's it for me. Enjoy your pig porridge.

- *Ah…*

- *Pfft!*

'Damn it. I'm sure she's enjoying this.'

It was true that we were profiting here, but Lee Ji-Hye was trying to annoy me about it. Of course, I understood what she was doing; we were actually earning a lot right now, even though there hadn't been any major events recently.

We needed to get as much holy power as possible, but she seemed to be enjoying the fact that I was suffering out here. Every time I contacted her, she'd complain about how busy she was, but she had never told me that she'd often be drinking coffee, doing half-baths while doing her nails, and relaxing while talking to me.

She was definitely making fun of me.

'Damn it, do I really need to call Ha-Yan?'

'How come we haven't gotten caught yet? How come they haven't found us yet?'

Why was Gen so competent when it came to useless things?

Hadn't he trained as a ranger?

I was sure he had done ranger training, and it was probably faster for me to deduce the type of training he had never received than the type of training he hadn't received.

The rangers of the Holy Knight and Black Swan Guild were so incompetent that Gen easily hid our tracks from them. No, it wasn't just that. It was like Gen knew their movements for some reason.

Whenever he suggested that we go out, I could tell from his face that he was confident about our chances of not getting caught.

I looked around and saw a deserted building that was so dilapidated it looked like it'd collapse any time soon. It was about five pyeong[1], and we were kind of in between the basement floor and the first floor, so we couldn't receive much light.

Actually, wait, there wasn't actually any light, as we were behind a rotten tree. As for how it managed to get here, I had no idea, but it was blocking the sun's rays from reaching out. Of course, there were some bushes around us as well.

It was highly likely that some hunters in the distant past were treating his place as a temporary camp, but it didn't really matter.

'Ah, it's leaking again.'

Perhaps it was because it had rained recently, but the ground was wet.

Half of the deserted building was buried in the ground, so it was constantly leaking into our temporary shelter. I used a broom to push the water out, but it wasn't working.

I had long gotten used to the damp smell, and things were much better in the afternoon as well, even though they weren't any sunlight. Since I couldn't turn on the light at night, I needed to clean up as much as I could while there was light outside to secure a comfortable sleeping space for myself.

'Please get out. Damn it, just get out.'

I fought the water for a long time, but in the end, I had to bundle up the rags and press them against the leaking corner.

I couldn't spend any more time on this because I needed to do something important today, and Gen would lie down on the wet floor anyway. He'd probably be satisfied by the fact that I actually tried to stop the water from coming in.

What I was about to do was more important than trying to stop the water from coming in.

I checked to see whether the sun was still up or not before immediately lighting the furnace.

'I'll finally be able to have a proper meal.'

We also had rum.

It wasn't much, but I was sure it was better than the pig porridge that we had been eating these days. After taking out a huge chunk of ham wrapped in a large leaf, I marinated it with the sauce I managed to get.

I also had bread and potatoes, so I had a pretty balanced meal. I immediately took out the wooden table and placed the food on a wooden plate. The criminal would be back soon…

'He'll be surprised since we've been eating pig porridge every day.'

Just as I expected, I felt a presence outside. Since he didn't enter immediately, he seemed to be in the middle of surveying our perimeter. He'd check his disguise and see whether there were any traces of mana nearby. They were his most important tasks, so he'd never neglect to do them.

'What has he been up to today? I'm sure he didn't go out just to get some ham… '

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young," Gen called out.

"Come in, Mr. Gen. Was everything okay?" I asked.

"Yes. It looks like the patrol nearby lightened up a bit. I think we can start moving tomorrow afternoon," Gen replied.

"That's a relief," I commented.

His eyes landed on the wooden table.

'This is what you call a meal.'

Gen looked at me in disbelief.

He seemed like he wanted to tell me something, but he seemed to have been waiting for me to say something.

"I prepared all this, Mr. Gen."

"*Ah…*"

"You've been working hard every time… so I just wanted to help…" I told him.

I pretended to be shy.

"I have rum as well, so how about we eat?" I offered.

'I'm proud of myself as well.'

"Where did you get this?" Gen asked.

“What?”

“Where did you get all of this, Mr. Lee Ki-Young?” Gen questioned.

“*Ah*, there were farmers nearby…” I replied.

‘If you walk south a little, there’s a small rural hamlet. I went there.’

“I obtained some leather from the monster you hunted last time…” I muttered.

‘I can’t even begin to explain how hard I worked to get it. My bloody hands became swollen, but I managed to do it.’

“I’m not sure whether the price was right, but I exchanged it for food that will last us a few days,” I informed him.

The price was obviously right. If anything, I profited from the deal. We’d be able to eat proper meals instead of just pig porridge for a few days at least, and I even got rum for us to drink.

“They were kind,” I said.

Actually, they were kind of rude, but I didn’t have a hard time talking to them.

“I’m sure you’re hungry, so let’s eat,” I suggested.

‘Let’s sit down and open the long-awaited party. Hey, there’s no point in living a painful life every day. We need days like these—relaxing days.’

I revealed a business-like smile and tapped his seat.

And that was when Gen said, “I never… asked you to do this.”

I obviously thought he was going to smile, but I was mistaken.

“What?”

“Do you understand the situation we’re in? I can’t believe you went to a farmer’s hamlet,” Gen questioned.

Gen's distorted face frightened me.

'Damn, what's wrong with you?'

I was careful, all right?

"I made sure that they wouldn't know me, so don't worry so much, Mr. Gen. Since it rained, my traces are probably…"

"That's not the problem!" Gen shouted.

'What's wrong with you? Did you just yell at me?'

"The world is a lot more dangerous than you think. Everyone isn't friendly. The farmers who live here all have a reason why they're here. It wouldn't be strange at all if something happened to you," Gen said.

"I was once—"

'I'm kind of strong… My Strength… '

"Please stop, Mr. Lee Ki-Young! Do you still not understand how immature your action was today? They could've captured you and sold you as a slave. A-All I'm saying is that you were lucky. You were lucky today," Gen interrupted me.

'Then stop cooking so much pig porridge. There's a reason I did all this… '

"I… I didn't want to bring you to a place like this. If… If you hold out just a bit longer…" Gen trailed off.

'How long do you want me to endure this? How long? You can't do anything, so I should at least try to do something. I somehow managed to put meat, potatoes, and rum on the table, and this is how you treat someone who's been working hard all day to do that?

'I know you're frustrated, but you shouldn't treat me like this, you incompetent fool.'

"I-I thought—"

"Now is the time to be careful. They may have notified the rangers about your

presence, and they might be tracking you right now using the traces that you've left. Erased traces are nothing to competent rangers," Gen explained.

'I know that.'

"I didn't think it through," I admitted.

"The continent… the world is a lot more dangerous than you think," Gen warned.

"I'm sorry," I said.

'Why should I apologize?'

When I showed a pitiful look, however, Gen seemed to come back to his senses. I understood his feelings, and the heartbroken Lee Ki-Young cared about how his feelings as well.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young…" Gen mumbled.

"…"

"I think… I was being too harsh," Gen added.

"It's fine, Mr. Gen. I should've been a little more careful. I'm sure you had a plan… I think I was being a bit presumptuous. I simply wanted to express my gratitude…" I told him.

"It's fine. That's not what—"

"S-Still, you should try it," I interrupted him.

Gen's expression was beyond words. I was sure there were many things he wanted to say to me. He probably felt bad because he had offered to show me the world and brought me out, but it had been two weeks since we were stuck in this deserted building.

He even got mad at me for trying to do something different, so I was sure he felt ashamed of himself. He seemed to have regretted his words upon seeing my guilty face, but it was too late.

It was too late for regrets.

Gen turned around as if saying that he had no courage to look at me.

“I’m going to take a quick look around again, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. Feel free to… eat first,” Gen said.

“Don’t be like that and eat—”

“I’m sorry,” Gen interrupted me.

I wasn’t planning on forgiving this criminal…

‘But you’re seriously in trouble… ‘

I gnashed my teeth.

---

1. roughly 20 sqft ☜

CHAPTER 932
GEN (11)

I was sure Gen had no excuses, as the life he had planned for us to live was completely different from the life we were living right now.

He was a Templar, so he had to have been walking down an established path since he was young. It wasn't strange that he was having trouble dealing with an unexpected situation like this. He was even shocked to hear that my disappearance had already spread throughout the continent.

An army of griffons were flying in the air, and rangers were on patrol everywhere.

All we could do was find a place to rest and wait for them to thin out.

Since he had been working as a Templar in the Sacred Democratic Country, he knew just how competent and stubborn the armed forces of the Sacred Democratic Country were.

The search party was an army of rangers that was the pride of the Black Swan Guild.

The guilds and armed groups were aiming to create a coordinated communication network to move systematically.

The opening was tiny, and it was extremely difficult to exploit it. I was sure that Templar Gen didn't want me to sleep in this messy and small place. He also didn't want me to eat pig porridge all day unless he was a psychopath.

I was certain he wanted to remove the tree, at the very least, to allow some sunlight into our room, but he probably thought that he needed to be careful of his every move.

That was probably why he didn't ask for basic necessities at that hamlet.

'I'm sure of it because that's what the results are telling me.'

The reason we managed to avoid the Sacred Democratic Country's search party for two weeks and counting was that we were cautious.

We minimized our contact with the people outside, erased our traces, and hid like turtles, hoping that the fire would just pass.

Obviously, Gen didn't yell at me because I had spoken with outsiders.

It was a variable, but it was something that could be handled. The reason he was still here was to erase my traces, and I was sure it was also because he couldn't forgive himself. Actually, it was more like he had no courage to face me.

'I didn't say I wanted to escape. You're the one who dragged me out here. Shit, I didn't even ask you to set me free. I only came here because you asked me to come here.'

I was sure he was fantasizing about it in his head.

He wanted to show me the sky and travel with me across the continent. He was definitely dreaming of a happy life where we were always full of smiles.

However, this horrible situation had been going on for two weeks now.

'Think you can hold out? I'm sure you feel really bad right now.'

I wasn't certain, as I couldn't read his mind, but he was definitely filled with regret and shame.

When he saw my inflamed hands, which worked tirelessly to obtain leather, he definitely recalled his words about how he wasn't going to let me suffer. Even though he had broken his promise, I was still smiling brightly at him. I was sure his heart shattered at the sight.

He was definitely questioning his behavior and decisions right now. He was also definitely questioning whether he had done anything right for me all this while. A variety of questions had probably popped up into his head.

He was anxious, scared, and sorry, and all these led him to raise his voice at me.

'...'

Of course, that was his own problem to handle, and there was no reason for me to worry about it.

'How dare you yell at me?'

I couldn't help but laugh about how hard I worked to skin an animal, as I wanted to feed that fool some meat. I was actually thinking about editing the script for him, as we had been living together for quite some time now, after all.

'Do you know how heartbroken I was?'

Gen had yet to return. I looked at him using my telescope and saw that he was quite far away. I assumed he was there to comfort himself. Once security had loosened up and I was all by myself, I could probably go out that far as well.

Soon, daybreak arrived, and Gen got ready to enter a small city.

He was moving cautiously underground. I assumed he was moving underground, as he had already determined that it would be too dangerous for him to enter the city through the main gates.

He unsheathed his sword and moved cautiously, thinking there were rangers around, but I didn't see any rangers nearby. The people nearby weren't really on high alert, and I presumed it was because they didn't have enough manpower to dispatch here.

'It's obvious why he's decided to visit this tiny city.'

He probably wanted to apologize to me by treating me better. He had to have been troubled when he saw the food I had prepared for him last night. He only had sixty gold with him, but he still needed to stock up before leaving for the Republic.

He arrived safely within the confines of the small city.

- *Whoo…*

He started looking around, and he exhaled loudly, which was enough for me to deduce just how nervous he was at the moment. He melded with the crowd, pretending to be one of the city's adventurers.

- I'm here to sell something.

Gen soon found himself at a shabby shop.

The owner bowed before asking.

- What are you trying to sell?

- This. How much can you give me?

'He took out Benigoa's rosario. This bastard was trying to sell his subject of devotion.'

-…

-…

- Where did you get this?

- Do I have to answer that question?

- You don't have to, but it'd be easier to sell if I know the source. At a glance, it looks like it's from the Sacred Democratic Country. I'm sure you'll be treated well if you take this to them. Actually, everyone is trying to avoid doing backroom deals… I don't even know if I can pay you the right price for this.

- How much can you give me?

- Um, let me check to see whether this is real or not. It looks like someone of pretty high status was the owner of this rosario. If you got this by killing a high priest of the Sacred Democratic Country, it'll be difficult for me to sell it.

- The Heretic Inquisitors was here just a few days ago, so I'm curious whether this item has anything to do with that.

- It doesn't have anything to do with them, so don't worry.

-…

- *Whoo…* I can give you exactly three hundred and forty gold.

-…

- If I sell it at the right price, I'll be able to get a thousand gold, but it's really hard to sell this thing in the current situation… I'm not trying to rip you off, so relax. I'm offering the best price after considering the risk that I'll have to take just to sell this thing.

-…

- That's all I can offer, so if you don't like it, I recommend going to another city and selling it… Most of the guys around here are conmen, so don't go to them… I'm sure you're already aware, but the Republic…

- I'll sell it.

- Really?

- Yes.

- *Ugh…* I feel like it's a *really* big loss for you… Do you want something else except gold?

- Any basic necessities such as food.

- I won't ask why… Wait here for a bit.

Gen looked nervous. He was worried that the merchant, who disappeared behind the store, would return with the search party.

Not many people were aware of the ongoing situation, but one could never be too cautious.

Moreover, fugitives often used the underground market, so I wouldn't be surprised to know that the search party had visited the market a few times these days.

There was a possibility that the store owner had reported Gen while he was in the back of his store, but it seemed that the store owner was the type of merchant who would never stab his customer in the back.

Of course, there was a chance that he was worried about the consequences of backstabbing Gen, as the latter looked pretty scary.

- This is all I can give you.

- This is enough.

- *Oh…* go ahead. It's not much, but I added ten more gold, so take the pouch.

-…

- You're not going to count it?

Gen nodded and left. He walked past the square in a hurry, so I assumed he thought that he had to get out of the city as soon as possible. However, I suddenly saw him stop in front of an adventurer shop.

'Boots?'

There was basic equipment like adventurer boots, comfortable clothes, and equipment that was a lot better than this dirty blanket. Of course, they looked cheap, but the set equipment that was being sold in the store seemed pretty cost-effective.

There were also ranked items in the story.

- The boots have an anti-fatigue effect. Sir, this is a rare item. They sell out as soon as they come out. It's kind of lacking for adventurers, as it doesn't have other features… but items with similar features are ideal for rookie travelers. This set item…

- I'll take it.

- It's a hundred and eighty-eight gold.

-…

Gen nodded and walked out of the store with a strange smile.

It was indeed a rare item.

They were becoming popular these days, as the manufacturing industry was in the middle of an industry boom. Despite that, the boots were still pretty rare.

The overall quality of manufacturers was still low, and there was a huge difference

between those at the top and those at the bottom. There were items without any effects, and Gen had gotten lucky to obtain those boots with an anti-fatigue effect.

I assumed it was probably because it was still daybreak; the majority of the adventurers were still fast asleep.

Gen smoothly left the city. He was worried, but he got what he wanted pretty easily.

However, I was sure he could feel that he had gotten lucky. The search party had already searched this city over the past two weeks, but Gen still managed to enter and exit it without much issue.

I assumed it was either the rangers and the Heretic Inquisitors who were working in shifts or their security had loosened, as they found no traces of Gen or me around here. If they had received news that I was spotted around here, I was sure a huge chunk of their forces would focus on searching this region.

Gen returned rather quickly. The criminal had brought a handful of items for me to make himself feel better. Perhaps it was because he had obtained basic necessities, food, and even boots with an anti-fatigue effect, but he seemed to be feeling better.

He stepped forward and knocked on the door.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young?”

Gen called out quietly, but I obviously didn’t answer.

“…”

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young.” He called out again and quietly opened the door.

Had he checked the dishes on the cheap wooden table?

The food was still warm, as I warmed it up upon confirming that he was going back.

“…”

I was sure he was touched. I waited for him until morning, so I was so exhausted that I ended up falling asleep. Of course, I didn’t actually fall asleep. Anyway, the point was that I made sure that the food wasn’t cold.

“Thank you,” Gen said.

“…”

He expressed his appreciation with a mutter upon checking my peaceful sleeping face.

“And… I’m sorry,” Gen added.

He even created a heartwarming atmosphere, but his smile suddenly turned into a frown.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young…?”

My face was covered in sweat. I heard a clattering sound as he turned me around.

I was as hot as a ball of fire.

“*Haa… haa… haa…*”

My face was pale, and I looked like I had caught the plague.

“*Ah…*” I groaned without realizing it. It was a fun adventure, but it was too difficult for my weak body. Perhaps my lifestyle over the past two weeks had worsened my condition.

The poor living conditions and the fact that we hadn’t been eating anything else but ham and pig porridge had ruined my body. Or perhaps I had gotten a bit too exhausted trying to get rid of the muddy water in our dwelling.

“Lee Ki-Young… Mr. Lee Ki-Young… Are you okay? Mr. Lee Ki-Young…” Gen asked.

Right now, I was sure he was thinking along the lines of this—*’I was having a good day, but I knew it was too good to be true.’*

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young… Mr. Lee Ki-Young!”

This bastard was definitely thinking along the lines of that.

CHAPTER 933
GEN (12)

"Are you okay? Mr. Lee Ki-Young. Mr. Lee Ki-Young…" Gen asked.

'Do I look okay?'

"Just… Just wait a moment," Gen said.

'Will you really be okay to let me wait? And what am I supposed to be waiting for? Are you going to cure me?'

"Damn it… why…" he mumbled.

'What do you mean why? Like fate, this was already decided. The ending of this fairytale is a bad ending. You really thought this was going to be a fairytale-like story?'

My body was weak to begin with, so this was bound to happen. It only happened sooner rather than later due to the recent streak of bad luck.

We were doing a pretty good job so far, but did he really think that nothing was going to happen? After my revival, my weak body had gotten worse.

My condition became so bad that I was struggling with my daily life.

I was the Honorary Cardinal of the Sacred Democratic Country and the continent's Saint of Light, so I had to ensure that everyone would think that I was okay.

I was that kind of person, after all—the kind of person who disliked it when others were worried about me. I also disliked seeing others getting hurt because of me.

I didn't want the continent and the people around me to be in pain because of me.

More importantly, I didn't want to become the reason behind Gen's pain.

Despite knowing that my body couldn't handle it, I still wanted a taste of freedom.

I wanted to see the beauty of the continent with my own eyes.

It was probably the reason I decided to take Gen's hand.

But he actually dared to…

'You actually dared to serve pig porridge to the Saint of Light.'

"Damn it… Damn it!" Gen shouted.

'And you've been keeping him locked up in such a tiny space?'

"I didn't know anything…" Gen mumbled.

'That's right. You don't know anything.'

"What the hell… did I do…"

'If you make me cry, you'll cry tears of blood.'

My body was extremely weak; I was like a trembling leaf that might fall off the tree at any moment.

Sun Hee-Young and Elena of the Blue Guild and the high priests of the Sacred Democratic Country were looking after me.

Gen and pig porridge was basically poison to me. It took me a long time to skin that animal and I even walked a long time in the rain while carrying something heavy, so it'd be strange if I hadn't gotten sick.

I was so frail that the smallest burden could be fatal to me.

To make things worse, I stayed up all night.

I wanted to feed him warm food, so I stayed up to ensure that the food wouldn't get cold.

Normally, people would be forced to go to bed whenever they were sick, so I wonder what he thought about what I felt when I decided to wait for him to come back for an entire night

I tried to hold out, but I couldn't endure it any longer.

"Why is the holy power…" Gen muttered in disbelief.

'You know this issue can't be resolved with holy power, and you're not even a priest. You can wield holy power, but it doesn't mean that you have healing powers like Sun Hee-Young or Elena.'

"…"

"*Haa… haa…"*

Gen didn't have many choices—no, he had no choice.

He was probably thinking that returning to the Vatican was the best option.

As I expected, he bit his lips.

Then, he carried me on his back and ran out into the pouring rain. It was one of those extreme situations that one would normally see in a drama, and I wouldn't be surprised if there were sad music playing in the background. Actually, I could already hear it.

'Where are you going?'

He wasn't even aware of where he was going or where he was supposed to go.

He was lost.

"Mr. Gen…" I mumbled.

Gen was surprised, and he hurriedly answered, "A-Are you awake?"

"Yes… Mr. Gen…" I answered.

"Please hold on a bit longer. Just wait… Get a good night's sleep, and everything will be over by the time you wake up," Gen reassured.

"A-Are we heading to the Republic?" I asked.

"…"

"Are we… finally… going to the Republic… after waiting for so long?" I asked.

"…"

"Can we… start a new life? Can we… get new identities… and live a new life?" I questioned.

"…"

"Will we be able to see a different sky… every day?" I asked.

I was so focused that I almost cried. I was acting in a really desperate way.

"So I can finally go to the places… you mentioned. I can finally… live a new life…" I said.

Gen was quiet. I wasn't sure what he was thinking, but he was probably thinking about turning himself in, as I looked like I was in critical condition. He probably thought that there was no other way to resolve the current situation unless he turned himself in.

"…"

"…"

"Yes… w-we're heading to… the Republic," Gen replied.

"I-I see."

It was a white lie that sent a shiver down my spine.

"We'll be arriving soon. So… hold out just a little longer," Gen informed me.

"…"

'You're not even running in the Republic's direction. Why are you telling me that when you're running in the opposite direction?'

“If you wait… just a little longer… you’ll… you’ll soon live the life you want,” Gen added.

He sounded like he was forcibly holding in his tears.

“You’ll be able to live a free life for as long as you want,” Gen said.

“…”

“You’ll see a new sky, go on adventures, and see new things. You’ll get to travel and meet strangers every day. You can enjoy such a life and do the things you’ve always wanted to do while helping people.

“You’ll no longer be sick or be in pain. You’ll smile every day…” Gen added.

“Lies…” I mumbled.

“…”

“*Haa… haa…* You’re… lying,” I said.

‘How dare you try to fool the Saint of Light?’

“You’re… lying right now,” I repeated.

‘I know you’re trying to turn yourself in. I know… you’re trying to devote yourself to the Vatican.’

“Do you know?” I started.

“…”

“Whenever you lie… *Haa…* your voice kind of shakes, and you look anxious… I can’t see your face, but I-I’m sure you look anxious right now. Your voice… is also higher than usual… your actions are also telling me… that you lied,” I told him.

“…”

“You’re nice,” I added.

'You criminal.'

"…"

"And warm," I said.

'You disgusting bastard.'

"Did I… faint? Did I… faint again?" I asked.

I was so out of it that my current condition was unknown even to me.

I couldn't tell whether I was awake or dreaming.

My head also felt like it was on fire. I was nauseous, and my eyes were hurting. It was like my entire body was dying. I spoke nonsense as if I was in the middle of a dream. I was out of it, but I knew what I wanted.

It was the only thing that I wanted. I didn't need anything else.

"Please… go to the Republic," I requested.

"…"

"I want to go to the Republic. I want to go there… and go on new adventures… with you…" I said.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," Gen said.

"Don't go back… to the Democratic Country," I begged.

"I'm… sorry," Gen repeated.

"Please… I beg you. I don't want to go back. I no longer… want to…" I paused.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. I…" Gen paused.

"I won't be happy," I told him.

"…"

“Even if I manage to get back on my feet again, I won’t be happy. I’m sure… I’ll be unhappy. If we return, I’ll resent you, Mr. Gen,” I threatened.

“…”

“Even if I recover from this sickness, I’m sure… I’ll regret it. I… I’d rather… just end it. I want to live more like a human being… live a life of freedom, even if it means certain death. I want to die doing the things I want to do,” I explained.

The script about how my life was going to end soon was like a bolt of lightning from out of the blue, but it didn’t seem out of place.

I had a good reason, and I wasn’t lying to him as well.

“I’m sure you can do that, b-but… now is not a good time,” Gen said.

“No, I’m sure I won’t get this chance again,” I denied.

“…”

“*Haa… haa…*”

“…”

“Please don’t go back. It’s my final request,” I begged.

Gen closed his eyes tight and glanced at me. He looked like he couldn’t reject my request. The pouring rain obscured the tears that were falling down his cheeks. He picked up the pace as his cries were being silenced by the rain.

‘Why was this man born with this kind of fate? Why can’t I, the Saint of Light, enjoy the things I deserve to enjoy? Why is the world treating us in such a harsh way? Why did Benigoa give such a harsh trial to me?’

“O Benigoa…” Gen said, but he sounded like he was resenting Her and cursing Her rather than praising Her.

“Don’t… resent her,” I said.

“…”

“It’s not… her fault,” I added.

I struggled to move my sick body to place a rosario in his hand, as I noticed that the rosario around his neck was nowhere to be seen. He trembled in surprise, but he tightened his grip around it.

“I want to live normally… during my final moments, and… I want to do what I’ve always wanted to do,” I said.

“…”

“I want to see… every single scenery that the continent… has to offer,” I added.

“…”

“I want to enjoy… adventures… with you,” I said.

And that was when Gen came to an abrupt halt.

“*Heuk…* at least…” I paused.

Gen stood frozen as if he had become a statue.

“I want to live… the life I want to live… even for a moment. *Heuk… heuuuk…”* I cried.

My acting was so amazing that I even managed to surprise myself.

I was so immersed that tears fell down like a waterfall from my eyes.

“Heuk… Kgh… In the end, I…” I trailed off.

Gen couldn’t move forward.

How could he head toward the Vatican while listening to the words I had never told anyone or hadn’t been able to express out loud?

I couldn’t see his face, but he was definitely suffering. He had no idea what to do, so he started thinking about many things and pondered over what would be the best choice for me.

“I don’t… want to… go back to the birdcage…” I mumbled.

Obviously, I wanted to go back.

I wanted to go back to the cozy and warm birdcage as soon as possible.

I wanted to drink coffee to start my day and end the day with a cup of wine.

I wanted to enjoy a half bath with a cold drink in hand, but I wanted to make Gen cry a bit more. I wanted to see him in pain and despair.

I was relieved to see him in a dilemma.

It didn’t matter even if we were to go back right now… but I could definitely convince him to stay out with me for three more days.

“Please… Please, I beg you,” I begged.

- Commander.

-…

- Come save me.

-…

- We’re heading to the Republic right now. I heard the news about your new project. If you help me with this, I’ll give you a bigger budget.

-…

- I want you to bring a lot of troops and make sure that those troops can give off an intimidating aura. I’ve been kidnapped. You heard it, right? I’m struggling right now.

-…

- I trust that you’ll be on standby, okay? By the way, I’m not asking for a favor because your project is on the line here. I trust you know what to do.

‘I really need to see him struggle to feel satisfied.’

-…

-…

- Shit. Lee Ki-Young, you bastard. Shit! Shit!!! Shit!!! You disgusting bastard!

CHAPTER 934
GEN (13)

“I’ve arrived in the city, Commander.”

—…

“I told you I’m here. What are you planning? How come you haven’t said anything yet?”

—…

“For your information, I’m staying at Emil’s Inn. Breakfast here isn’t so bad, but the room isn’t that great. Ah! I didn’t know this kind of city existed. It has a nice atmosphere, and the black market looks useful as well… Black markets must be pretty common in the Republic.”

—…

“I’m alone, so it’s pretty boring. You did receive the official document that the Continental Protection Management Committee sent to you, right? You’re hiding it from Hyun-Sung, right? If you don’t hide it, he’ll cause a huge fuss.

“They’ve been focusing on the Federation, and I think it’s because there are some rumors that I was spotted around there. Thanks to that, I have been able to work comfortably here, and I’ve been walking around by myself as well.”

—…

“It’ll get more complicated if you don’t come here, Commander. They might start notifying the public because there’s no progress in their search.

“The Vatican is in a state of total emergency, and the continent will fall into chaos again. I’m sure you don’t want that to happen, right? You worked so hard preparing for that project of yours. You really want a variable to ruin that?”

—…

"If you don't take care of this… how are you going to get your project done? Commander Jin, how can I leave the continent to you… when you can't even handle an easy task like this?

"Am I wrong? If you're doing this because of Ji-Hye noona, I'll be hurt. You need to know who the actual manager is. Technically, it's me. You know that, right? Right? You didn't curse me just now, did you? I'm the boss. I'm your boss."

—…

"Hey, Commander Jin. Do you really think I'm joking? Is that what you think? Can you not hear what I'm saying?"

— Damn it…

"That's right."

— Damn you, Lee Ki-Young. You don't have to nag me, as I've been taking care of it. If you hadn't told me to take care of that idiot musclehead, I would have been in the city by now.

"You mean Hyun-Sung? He's doing well, right?"

— I'm telling you not to get me involved in ridiculous things like this. I have my own business to take care of… and watching that fool is not a part of it…

"Interns are normally in charge of miscellaneous things."

— You disgusting bastard. Why am I… Damn it.

"You want to quit?"

—…

'I know you don't want to.'

"You can quit if you want to. We have a lot of manpower."

— Bullshit.

'He caught on.'

"We actually have a lot of manpower… but why are you getting stressed out over things like this? I feel bad for offering you this position. You said you had a lot on your plate… and now you have to work on the continental project as well… so I just… feel bad…

"I feel like I'm burdening you a lot. Maybe… I overestimated your capabilities… Let me know if you have too much on your plate."

—…

'He must be mad.'

His pride was probably getting in the way as well.

He probably felt ashamed of himself, as he wanted to tell me that he'd definitely bring me down, but he just couldn't bring himself to say it.

Based on his temper, I was sure he wanted to quit right now, but how could he give this up so easily when he already had a taste of it?

The ability to manage the continent and do whatever project he desired was probably like a sweet fruit that couldn't be exchanged with anything else.

It was especially true for people like us.

'Think about your project getting trashed while you're working so hard on it. I'm sure it'll feel like it was all in vain.'

"Commander. I was kind of harsh."

—…

"I will provide you with a generous research fund, so be careful on your way here."

—…

'He's actually mad.'

—…

“You better keep your promise.”

I was sure he didn’t want to give up on the research fund.

When I heard his answer, I immediately started moving. It was time to act.

“Mr. Gen,” I called out.

“…” “Mr. Gen… it’s time to wake up,” I said.

“*Ah…* It looks like… I woke up late. I’m sorry,” Gen said.

“It’s fine. You worked hard last night. I packed you lunch, so have it during your lunch break,” I offered.

“*Ah*… you didn’t have to do this, Mr. Lee Ki-Young,” Gen said.

“I’d like to go with you, but it’s hard for me to move right now… This is the least I can do when you’re out there getting us some money. Don’t you agree?” I asked.

“But…”

“Don’t worry too much,” I told him.

“H-How’s your leg?” Gen asked.

“It’s kind of hard to move it, but I can walk, as you can see. I’m sure I’ll feel better by the time we get our new identities,” I replied.

‘We would have avoided this suffering if you had just brought more gold coins with you. You really thought that making a new identity would be easy with a mere sixty gold and by selling your rosario?’

Gen stared at me as if I was pitiful. I was fine, but I couldn’t move properly due to a recent incident. I was limping, and I couldn’t move my arms properly as well.

I couldn’t see through one of my eyes, and I often vomited whatever I ate.

I could no longer eat the pig porridge. My body had gotten ruined to the point that I couldn’t live a normal life anymore. Of course, it didn’t matter to me since I was a

determined person.

It was like me to do my best to live an energetic life despite the hardships.

I smiled and opened the door, allowing the sizzling sun to pour into the room.

The honorary cardinal was desperate for freedom, so I welcomed the warm wind and sunlight with my body.

"The weather is nice today," I said.

"You're right. It does look nice. Mr. Lee Ki-Young," Gen called out.

"*Ah*, one moment," I said.

"Are you planning on going out today as well?" Gen asked.

"Yes. I need to go grocery shopping," I replied.

'I'm going to drink some coffee and relax a bit.'

"I told you… you didn't need to do that…" he mumbled.

'We need to save so we get the money we need quickly. Also, why do I need your permission for every little thing I do? You remember what happened last time, right? If you don't support me, who's going to support me?'

"You must be careful," Gen warned.

"Yes, I know. Nothing happened last time either," I told him.

"It seems like the Vatican's attention is on the Federation, but this place isn't safe either. It's possible that someone has been observing us, and we also have to consider the possibility that someone has been tracking us.

"You have to promise—promise me that you'll only go to the places that I told you about and walk down the path I had plotted for you. If you go to other places—"

"I'll only stop by the market," I interrupted him.

"*Whoo…"* Gen sighed as he wore his equipment.

It was obvious what he was thinking as he looked at his items that suddenly became sparkling clean overnight. He was feeling guilty.

The more I did things for him, the more guiltier he became.

He probably wanted to tell me I didn't need to do this, but he couldn't bring himself to say that and simply went silent, falling into the quagmire of sadness and affection toward me.

He cried when he saw me limping and moving with difficulty. He was trying his best to hold in his tears, and he turned around to grab his equipment, making sure that I wouldn't see him crying.

For some reason, he looked pitiful in my eyes.

"I'll be back," Gen said.

"I'll see you later," I said.

However, I was really happy to hear him cry.

"I'll come back as soon as I can today," Gen said.

"Okay."

"Also…" Gen paused.

"Yes?"

"I'm always grateful," Gen continued.

"It should be me who should tell you that," I told him.

"Thank you… very… very… much," Gen said.

"Be safe out there," I said.

'Stop talking and go. I want to enjoy my free time.'

Gen stood at the door for a while before heading outside.

I wrapped the washed blanket around myself and headed out as well.

I had washed the blanket and dried it under the sun, but it was still dirty.

Unfortunately, I had no choice but to do this if I wanted to hide my identity.

Gen was right. We were still in a dangerous situation.

I placed the blanket over my head…

'Let's go get some coffee.'

I had been cleaning his equipment this morning and had spent the latter part of it packing his lunch, so I was pretty tired. I needed a break.

I started walking away.

This city had a pretty interesting atmosphere.

Since there was a black market here, I thought it would be underdeveloped or dangerous, but that wasn't the case at all. The adventurers frequented this place to buy and sell items they couldn't buy or sell through ordinary means.

It wasn't as luxurious as the black markets built out in the open, but it was lively. It would be safe to say that the Republic had indirectly acknowledged their existence. I was sure they were making a ton of money, and ironically, they were pretty transparent.

'I'll just ask Jin Cheong later.'

Of course, the city had the typical, cliched black markets as well.

Gen frequented those places to accept requests or get rid of items, but it was none of my business.

I stopped by the market and bought food that we were going to eat for the next four days…

'I found a cafe.'

I started walking toward the cafe…

"It's the Blue Guild," someone said, and I immediately cowered in response.

'What the? They shouldn't be here.'

They were supposed to be at the Federation right now.

Did they not stop Lian and Chang-Ryeol from coming here?

I remained silent to eavesdrop.

"Who? I don't see any familiar faces."

"They're Blue Guild members from the Blue Guild's Republic branch."

I nodded at that. I was sure they had decided to accept new guild members, as I had put them in charge of establishing a branch in the Republic. They could be temporary adventurers or interns.

Still, it looked like Kim Hyun-Sung was doing his job properly. I considered the possibility of Jin Cheong taking care of most of the tasks, but Kim Hyun-Sung had achieved a pretty good result.

I was happy. I could start a new business and enter dungeons by then.

'Where did they go?'

"*Huh?*"

I was curious about the stats and nature of the new guild members. I didn't need to avoid them, as they didn't know me, but I wrapped the blanket around me even tighter.

"I can see the Blue Guild's seal from here," I mumbled.

"Over there. I heard they're a promising group of adventurers who had cleared the tutorial dungeon the quickest among this bunch of newbies. Looks like they ended

up joining the Blue Guild.

“I heard they were promised a really high salary. I’m jealous. They just arrived here, but they’re already living on a bed of roses.”

“The guilds in the Republic didn’t make an offer to them?”

“They were afraid that people were going to make rumors, as the Guild Master of the Blue Guild had announced that he had picked them himself. I’m sure they joined for the sake of money, power, and strength. I’m sure no guilds in the Republic can offer half the benefits that the Blue Guild is offering right now.”

“That’s true.”

This story sounded familiar.

‘Perhaps I should have paid attention to them.’

It honestly didn’t matter, but it was interesting.

I wasn’t sure whether Kim Hyun-Sung had actually picked them himself or not, but they were members of the Blue Guild. In other words, we’d inevitably meet later.

Of course, they had just completed the tutorial, so it’d take some time for them to become an official guild member, but if they were skilled, it was going to be fine even if I gave them special support from the sidelines.

I looked around and bumped into someone.

I staggered backward. Perhaps it was because I had been acting like I had a limp, but I immediately lost balance and rolled on the ground.

I looked back and saw someone with the Blue Guild’s seal on their chest

“What the hell is wrong with this beggar?” they said.

‘What?’

“There’s a beggar on the road…”

'What did you just say?'

CHAPTER 935
GEN (14)

"So unlucky. *Ah…* I just bought this equipment… Damn it," the man grumbled.

'You can just wipe it clean, you bastard. You're ridiculous, and you look really young to say that to me.'

"…"

"Hey, get up," the man said.

"…"

"I said get up. Geez… people are looking. Whatever…" the man grumbled.

"…"

"Just give him some gold. Things are going to become difficult for us if you don't," a woman suggested.

"*Whoo…*"

"You should consider where the others are as well. How much longer are you going to act like you're still in the tutorial dungeon?" an older man chimed in.

"But that beggar blocked my path, hyung. I didn't even bump into him that hard, but he fell on the ground.

"He's obviously a scammer. Don't you find his actions disgusting? I can only overlook it so many times. If you're short on gold, don't think about swindling people and just get a job, you homeless bastard. Geez…" the man grumbled.

"Stop."

"…"

“Don’t make it more complicated. You have to be careful not to get involved in ridiculous situations like this. The guild master seemed like he’s been in a bad mood lately… If something happens, I don’t know what we’re going to do”

‘Since when was Kim Hyun-Sung your guild master? He’s my guild master.’

“*Whoo…*”

‘Wait… ‘

“It’s so unfortunate. How much do you need?” the man asked.

‘I have a lot of money, you fools. Your salaries are paid from my own pocket.’

“What’s going on?”

“I’m not sure. I think there’s been a fight.”

“The Blue Guild?”

“Really?”

The people nearby started murmuring. I had to avoid attention at all costs, but this was beyond my control. The situation was also so absurd that I had no idea what to say.

The Blue Guild’s new guild members consisted of two men and two women.

I checked their stats using Mind’s Eye and nodded. Their potential and growth weren’t similar to new adventurers who had just completed the tutorial.

They were worth the investment based on their stats alone. They weren’t superhuman like Jung Ha-Yan or Kim Hyun-Sung, but they had better potential than Ahn Ki-Mo or Lee Chang-Ryeol.

If it hadn’t been for this incident, I would have tried training them because they knew their worth better than anyone.

‘Yeah, they probably think that they got everything.’

The Blue Guild was no longer a dying guild, like when we had just joined it.

The Blue Guild was the best guild throughout the continent, and it had a massive influence on other kingdoms and regions, not just on Sacred the Democratic Country.

Even if they ended up becoming bottom-of-the-barrel guild members, no one could afford to ignore them due to the fact that they were members of the Blue Guild.

Even the recent rookie, Belier, already had a massive influence. If my memories were serving me correctly, she was recently invited to a social gathering that ordinary people couldn't even dream of attending.

Obviously, the guild disliked those types of ridiculous social gatherings, but attending them was up to the person.

These fools…

'They look like they're enjoying it.'

They seemed to have realized that they were one of the privileged people, and they were acting as if they were leading a different life compared to ordinary people.

They seemed to have enjoyed spending the large amount of money that they had earned, as they looked pretty good in their equipment.

They had to have eaten something good as well, as they looked really happy.

They were full of confidence, too.

They had been living ordinary lives prior to getting summoned here, so they probably felt like protagonists of a story. I was sure the world had become inexplicably beautiful in their eyes.

'Kim Hyun-Sung. Did you not do a personality check on them?'

Obviously, they were uncomfortable with the attention.

The quick-witted one displayed a business-like smile and asked, "Are you okay, sir?"

'What? Sir?'

“Looks like we made a huge mistake. Natalia. Can you check if he’s hurt anywhere?” he requested.

“Okay.”

“Can you stand up, sir?” he asked.

“I don’t think he’s injured. He does look like he needs to rest a little because he seems to be in pretty bad shape,” Natalia informed.

‘At least he’s quick-witted.’

However, his gaze toward me was cold.

‘Yeah, I’m sure it’s annoying dealing with a homeless person when you’re a privileged adventurer.’

If it hadn’t been for the people around us, he would have ignored me and gone on his way. He could have even harassed me. The least he’d do was spit on me.’

“A-Are you okay?” the man asked.

“I’m right, hyung. That bastard needs gold. I offered to take him to the hospital, but he refused,” the other man complained.

“Stop.”

“This is all I have with me right now. It should be enough to get treatment, so use it wisely and watch where you’re going next time,” he warned.

‘Everyone, listen to how this fool is talking.’

Obviously, the people couldn’t hear him, and all they saw was a heartwarming sight of him giving me some money. I was relieved that he was quick-witted enough to know that there were people staring at them.

The Blue Guild had an image to uphold—Actually, that wasn’t important right now.

“Consider yourself lucky,” he commented.

“I told you to stop. We’ll be going now. Sorry again for the trouble,” the man said.

After helping me stand up, they disappeared into the crowd, and I noticed people looking at me enviously.

When I opened the pouch, I saw a few dozen coins inside of it.

To me, it was a small amount, but it was a lot of money for me right now. I noticed some people revealing greedy looks at the sight. I was just a homeless person, after all, so they definitely thought that I was an easy target.

‘All right, fine. So you think of me as a swindler?’

“Commander.”

—…

“Hey, Commander Jin.”

—…

“Cheongie hyung. Can you hear me?”

—…

“Hey.”

— Damn it. What do you want?

“Have you heard about how the Blue Guild’s Republic branch had recently recruited new guild members into their ranks?”

—…

“Who recruited them? Was it Hyun-Sung?”

— So you’ve met them.

“Did Hyun-Sung really pick them? You picked them, right?”

— Both of us have approved of them, so we recruited them. That muscle headed fool had decided to ask for my advice, and I gave him the advice that he wanted to hear.

"What exactly did he want to hear?"

— Fast results.

—…

— He wanted to get results as fast as possible. Weren't they polite and useful? They're pretty talented as well. More importantly, their growth rate is quite high. They're already creating a buzz, so the Republic… has a good impression of them. In fact, they have already cleared a dungeon.

"What about their personality?"

— I told you that they're pretty polite.

'Yeah, but only to you and Kim Hyun-Sung.'

'I mean, who wouldn't kowtow in the face of absolute strength?'

I was certain that even people with anger management issues would act docile before their superiors.

They were just pretending to be nice.

How could one eat a random fruit before them without checking if it was edible first?

"Did you do a background check on them?"

— What is there to investigate when they just came out of the tutorial dungeon? They weren't even offered an official seat. They're simply temporary guild members of the Blue Guild's Republic branch…

"Like you?"

—…

"It was a bad joke, so forget it. Don't be hurt by it or be upset. Anyway, why did you

bring them here?"

— Is that important? They're here to enjoy their long-awaited break. They might be celebrating their successful dungeon raid right now.

"Who the hell enjoys their break at a black market? Well, I know you do. You even snuck into a black market like a rat to buy a maid for two million gold. You said you can read people, but you ended up picking people who are just like you.

"Kim Hyun-Sung didn't pick them, right? You bastard. I know you gave him false hope, you fool."

— I don't know what you're mad about, and I don't know why you're taking it out on me.

"So you're just going to let Kim Hyun-Sung do whatever he wants? I'm sure the Blue Guild's Republic branch is beneficial for you as well. Can't you put more effort into it?"

— I'm not someone you can take your anger out on. Know your boundaries.

"And what if I don't?"

— There's a limit to my patience.

"And what are you going to do once you've gone over that limit? Are you going to quit? Hey, Intern Jin! If you don't want to do it, then leave!"

— Damn it, you bastard! What the hell did I ever do to you?! All I did was carry out the things you asked me to do. I spent time with that muscle headed fool. I helped him with his tasks, and I even became like a parrot just to make him understand certain things that he was struggling to understand for some reason.

— I didn't want to do any of those things, damn it! I don't want to listen to your nitpicking or even get involved with you. Damn it! Damn it! Lee Ki-Young, you disgusting bastard! I don't care about the Blue Guild's Republic branch or whatever! I don't want to spend another second with that dumbass! And the fact that you're acting rude in front of me is just…

—…

— Hold on… I got worked up. I apologize.

'I honestly understand his frustration.'

— Damn it…

'Hyun-Sung has a knack for making people feel frustrated.'

I had forgotten about that and had taken out my anger on Commander Jin.

He had to have been having a hard time as well… I was being selfish here.

'I already feel frustrated at the thought of teaching Hyun-Sung to do certain things, so how could others not feel frustrated about it?'

"It's fine. I completely understand how you feel, but I won't go easy on you next time. You better manage that temper of yours."

—…

"Also, I'm busy right now. There's somewhere I need to be. See you later."

— Where are you going?

"I'm going to make money."

We had some idiots on the loose.

I needed to show them how violent and harsh society could be. In addition, I could also run into the criminal whom I had been taking care of these days

I spaced out for a moment, but I immediately took action. I stood up and used my telescope to find them. I wasn't sure whether they were enjoying the attention or were looking for a restaurant to eat at, but they were still near the square.

I went back to acting like I was limping and wrapped myself in my dirty blanket.

"Don't do anything foolish…" the older member warned.

"I know," the other male replied.

“Think carefully about the meaning of the guild seal we have on our chest. Think carefully about what this means to us. We’re not the same as them,” the man said.

“…”

“We must forgive them and be generous. That’s the privilege of those who stand above others… and that’s the world we must live in from now on. We have to worry about how others look at us and be modest even in the smallest and insignificant situations.

“We’re on a different level. With great power comes great responsibility. Compared to the things we’ll be enjoying in the future… these things aren’t that hard to endure,” the older member explained.

“*Whoo…”*

“It’s not that I don’t understand how you feel, but…” the man trailed off.

I waited for them in an alleyway and appeared when they got close enough.

“*Ah!*” I screamed.

“…”

“You’re…!”

“You’re… the beggar… from earlier,” the older man said.

It seemed that I looked really weak in their eyes.

“Why… is this bastard…” the man said.

“*Ack…”* I groaned.

The way I rolled on the ground made me look like I got hit by an eight-ton truck.

“*Ahhh… Ack…”* I groaned.

“What is this beggar… doing right now?” the man questioned.

CHAPTER 936
GEN (15)

"You… bastard," the man said.

'Everyone, look over here.'

"…"

"*Haa…"* I moaned.

"You bastard! Just now, you!" the man shouted.

"*Ahhh…"* I groaned.

"S-Stop!" the older man yelled.

'He almost hit me.'

The impatient one immediately raised his hand, and he seemed to be thinking that I saw them as walking bags of money because he was trembling in anger.

Right now, I definitely looked like…

'A con artist. I definitely looked like a con artist right now.'

I looked like someone crossing the line and to squeeze as much money as I could from these people. I appeared careless, but I knew what I was doing. They were in their pre-training period, and causing trouble would put them at a disadvantage.

They knew that better than anyone else.

However, I knew that the soft-hearted Kim Hyun-Sung wouldn't bully or pressure them in any way.

'He's not even Doom Hyun-Sung right now, so he's really kind right now. He's so

innocent… '

If they had met Jin Cheong before, they definitely had an idea as to what things were like here, as Jin Cheong was really sensitive when it came to incidents and the news that the many different media outlets were churning out.

I didn't know exactly what the Republic branch was like, but I believe there was some order around here.

The fact that they were being cautious around a beggar meant that they were painfully aware of the fact that one mistake could end their career. Of course, that could be just an exaggeration, and they could be given just a few warnings.

Unfortunately, they were in a city famous for its black market.

'Although I have no idea why they are here when they're supposed to enjoy their break.'

They weren't here to do charity work.

It was possible that they came here without knowing anything, but it was all a matter of perspective.

'I'm sure Hyun-Sung would love it if the new guild members caused trouble here of all places.'

Kim Hyun-Sung was nice to them, but he was the type who knew how to separate his public life from his private life.

As I expected, the older man looked around.

More and more people were gathering around us, and the sight made him bite his lips.

'That's right. You guys messed with the wrong person.'

"…"

'The scariest person out there is someone who has nothing to lose.'

"Hyung, this bastard…"

“You bastard. Do you have any idea what you’re doing right now?” the older man questioned after casting a soundproofing spell around us. He immediately got angry and unleashed his man to threaten me, but it wasn’t enough to make me kneel.

‘Of course I know, idiot.’

“You psychotic bastard. We’re—”

“I know,” I interrupted them.

“What?”

“You’re members of the Blue Guild. The new members of the Republic branch, right?” I asked.

“…”

“Whether I know that or not isn’t important. I want you to be aware of the fact that you guys are in a bad situation right now. How dare you persecute the weak of society as a group? You even tried to hit me, so I’m sure things are going to get worse,” I told them.

“What the hell are you talking about…” the man asked.

“The public sides with the weak,” I said.

The man looked around, and the people around were looking at him.

He simply glanced at them, but I could tell that he knew what was going on.

The short-tempered man had made a mistake by raising his hand at me. Violence was a bad idea, and one ought to smoothen out the situation by talking it out first before resorting to any violence.

“Looks like you’re caught in an unfair situation… You can just explain it,” I said.

All he had to do was open a people’s court. He could say that it wasn’t his fault and that it was my fault. He could also say that I was trying to scam them by harming myself before them.

He could also shout and blame me to obtain everyone's support, but I was sure that something like that wouldn't happen.

After all, there were witnesses to our altercation earlier, and I had prepared a counterargument as well.

'If you're going to open an illogical people's court, then I welcome it.'

"You can also report me," I suggested.

'I'm the one that's causing the problem, after all.'

"I'm going to hire a state-funded lawyer," I told them.

I obviously had no time for that, but I needed to show some guts.

'They're at a bigger disadvantage than me.'

The trial would be long, and it'd be a long fight.

If they were an official guild member, the lawyers of the guild would defend them, but the Republic branch of the Blue Guild was being operated by Kim Hyun-Sung all by himself, so it was impossible.

Honestly, taking such a trivial incident to court was an absurd thing. The process would be extremely lengthy, and the media would obviously charge in to cover the unprecedented drama.

I was sure the press would publish articles with titles along the lines of…

'New guild members of the Blue Guild's Republic Branch caught up in violence, or the leaders of society stepping on those underprivileged.'

'They could also ask…

"Why they're even in this city…" I mumbled.

Even if they somehow won, the people would always think of them as violent people, but if they ended up losing…

“If you’re so confident, go ahead. I have nothing to lose. You guys are the ones who have a lot to lose,” I said.

“Crazy bastard,” the man cursed.

“That’s exactly right. You guys messed with the wrong crazy bastard. If you don’t plan on taking this to court… how about we go back to the point… and show me mercy?” I suggested.

I lowered my head and wiped away my tears. One of the guild members behind them frowned as if they were watching a crazy bastard, and they were right.

Unfortunately, they had yet to realize that their actions and words were in conflict.

“Hyung… are you really…”

Between someone who stood to lose everything and someone who stood to lose nothing, the former obviously had a massive advantage over the latter.

“Don’t you dare show your face in front of me again, you bastard,” the older man warned.

“If you pay me enough, I’ll disappear quietly. Don’t be cheap like earlier, and give me a good amount. Be generous. *Hehe*,” I told him.

The older man took out his pouch. It seemed that he had earned a ton of money, as he was spending it like it was nothing.

“Are you seriously—”

“Quiet,” the older man interrupted his party member.

He helped me up quietly. He seemed worried about what the people thought about them because he pretended to be worried about me while handing over a hefty gold pouch to me.

‘They’re still rookies.’

I had no idea that he’d compromise so easily. I thought they were actually going to open a people’s court. What was making them act so cautious?

'Is Commander Jin that scary? He must be far stricter than I thought.'

"Go away," the older man said.

"Thank you, sir," I said.

"This is the last time I'm forgiving you. Don't appear in front of me again. If you do, I'll do whatever it takes to—"

"Yeah, yeah. Have a good day," I interrupted him.

"…"

"Before I leave, the short-tempered man over there should learn to manage his temper. This is sincere advice from me," I told them.

Even if I were to appear before them, I was sure they wouldn't be able to do anything to me, as it wouldn't be that easy for them to take advantage of their authority as guild members of the Blue Guild.

They wouldn't be able to do anything other than tell the guild master or consult the guild staffers about it. Actually, I was sure they didn't even have enough staffers in the Republic Branch.

I was sure they were simply given those seals before being told to take a break.

'I'm curious about whether those idiots are up to something, but I can check that later because we're going out tonight. Right, Mr. Gen?'

"…"

"…"

"Welcome back, Mr. Gen. You really came back early today," I greeted.

"I told you that I would," Gen said.

"I-I just feel bad. I didn't think you'd come back this early… so I didn't prepare any food… H-How about we go out and eat?" I suggested.

"…" "If you're uncomfortable about doing that—"

"I think it's fine to do that once in a while," Gen answered.

"I'll lead you to the restaurant. I already made the reservations. Do you know what day it is today?" I asked.

"What?"

'I don't know either, man. So don't make that kind of face.'

"Yes… of course I know," Gen said.

'Another white lie.'

"Today… is a very special day for me," I told him.

He didn't bother asking me. He seemed to have decided that it was better to stay quiet rather than become a jerk with a bad memory.

I was sure he was thinking hard about it, but he couldn't possibly find an answer, as this day was just an ordinary day for me. He seemed to be feeling guilty, but all he could do was play along with the Saint of Light, who was having a ton of fun.

"I agree, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," Gen said.

"I honestly thought you'd forgotten, so… I'm happy that you still remember it," I said.

"O-Of course… How could I forget it?" Gen stuttered.

So what was so special about today?

'This guy is actually lying to me. He's talented at lying.'

I used my telescope to search for my targets and found them at a restaurant.

I entered the same restaurant with Gen and sat in a corner of the restaurant.

"It's a nice place," Gen commented.

“I told you. I really wanted to show my appreciation, Mr. Gen,” I told him.

“I should be the one thanking you,” Gen said.

I looked around and saw the idiots sitting at a table far from us.

When the short-tempered man got up to go to the bathroom…

“Do you mind if I head to the bathroom?” I asked.

“Go ahead,” Gen replied.

I followed the short-tempered man into the bathroom.

“*Huh?*”

I just had to collide with him as he was walking out of the bathroom, and it’d be mission success.

He tried to avoid me, but I was confident of my Agility, so I managed to bump into him.

I fell to the ground.

It seemed that I had bumped into him harder than I was supposed to because the noise echoed throughout the entire restaurant.

Hot-tempered number one frowned and glared at me. He looked like he was struck by deja vu, and he couldn’t believe that something as ridiculous as this was happening to him again.

He couldn’t see my face, but he instantly saw through my identity upon seeing my smile.

I didn’t think that this was enough to provoke him, but he quickly proved me wrong.

“*AAAAAH!*” I yelled.

“You crazy beggar!” the hot-tempered man shouted.

"*Ack! Ahh!*" I screamed.

"Do you have any idea who I am?! Who we are?!" the hot-tempered questioned.

"*Ahhhhhh!"* I yelled.

'Damn, that hurts.'

"You begging bastard! If you want to be crazy, go and be crazy with someone else. *Ptooey!* You bastard! Did you think we were joking when we said that we wouldn't forgive you again—"

"Ack!" I screamed, interrupting him.

The hot-tempered man was shouting in fury while I was screaming in pain. I was screaming because I was actually surprised by his outburst.

Meanwhile, Gen was preparing to have a nice time with me to celebrate this random day.

'Why isn't he coming here?'

"*Ahh! Ack!*" I screamed again.

'The Saint of Light is dying, man.'

"M-Mr. Gen…" I mumbled.

Boom!

I saw the hot-tempered man falling to the ground.

"What the hell are you doing, you piece of trash?" Gen questioned.

'He knows how to curse as well?'

"I asked you what you were doing to him, you bastard," Gen repeated.

CHAPTER 937
GEN (16)

'You're too late, man.'

"*Haa… Heuk…"* I groaned.

'Shit, you scared me. You scared me a lot.'

"You piece of trash," Gen said.

"*AAAAAH!*" the short-tempered man screamed.

I trembled at the sweet melody. The man's scream was several times louder than my scream. Gen was in the middle of treating the short-tempered man's anger management issues in a not-so-gentle way.

However, it was basically a miracle from the goddess.

'It's the Goddess Benigoa's miracle. But it really hurts… '

"*Ahh! Gaaaaaaah!*" the short-tempered man screamed.

'Nice tune.'

"*Gah! Aaaack!*"

'Nice!'

"*Ah…!*"

'Yes!'

Gen frowned, and his fist trembled as he bit his lips. Blood started dripping down his fist, and I was proud of that fist because the blood on it had come from the short-tempered man. It was a lovely fist.

Honestly, Gen didn't look happy. He seemed to be having mixed emotions and one word wasn't enough to describe how he looked. He was probably thinking that he needed to hold it in because he couldn't attract any attention right now.

However, how could he hold it in when I was dying?

How could he stand by and not do anything when the Saint of Light, who had been living a life of sacrifice, ended up getting caught up in violence full of malice?

How could he not do anything when I was rolling on the dirty ground, getting insulted, and getting spat on by a thug?

He was already feeling guilty toward me.

He was worried that his wrong decision was making me suffer, and he was also irresponsibly clinging to an impossible dream. I was sure he enjoyed seeing me every day, but a part of him was also heartbroken by how difficult his goals were to achieve.

I was sure his goals were something along the lines of…

'I want to make him happier.'

'I don't want him to be in pain any longer.'

'I'm going to protect him. I won't let him get hurt anymore.'

Actually, it was none of my business because it was highly likely that he had all sorts of thoughts.

We had just settled down and were about to start a new life. He made a decision not to hurt me anymore and to protect me at all costs. He had just made that decision when this incident happened.

"How dare… How dare you…" Gen mumbled.

"*Ack! Gah!!!*" the short-tempered man screamed.

Gen was so angry that I couldn't compare his current expression to the expression of his everyday, normal self. He grabbed the short-tempered man, who had lost his will

to fight, by the collar and lifted him up, creating a very dramatic scene.

The scene was so one-sided and dramatic that *he* looked like the villain. If he could see himself, I was sure he'd be surprised because he didn't look like his usual self.

Anyway, I knew what I had to do, and it was pretty obvious.

"I-It's fine, Mr. Gen… I'm fine. It was just an accident. Please let him go."

'I don't want anyone to get hurt. I'll forgive even my attacker.'

'Knock him out! Shit! I think I have a bruise on my face. Ruin his face!'

"He…"

"I… *Ugh*… bumped into him first…" I told Gen.

"Do you… Do you realize what you've gotten yourself into? This man… Do you know what you look like right now? Do you know what you look like as you're saying that to me?" Gen questioned.

"He must have a reason… *Ack*… I'm fine, so please… let him go. Treatment—"

My words were interrupted by Gen slamming the short-tempered man into the wall.

"You bastard!"

"*Ack!"*

The onlookers already had their hand mirrors out, so I was sure everyone would soon know what was going on here.

One of the new recruits charged at Gen with their sword out.

Their movement was fast and sharp.

They seemed to have received training from Kim Hyun-Sung, as their movement seemed unusual. When I saw that they had imbued mana into their sword, I could tell that they were determined to cut Gen down, but…

Boom!

They fell to the ground, and I saw that a part of their body was crushed.

'Are they dead?'

"*Gah!*"

The attacker's arms and legs were twisted in an abnormal way. The priest of the party quickly cast a spell, but it wasn't enough to treat the injured assailant.

'That was a fatal attack.'

The guy who looked like the leader also rushed in, but it wasn't effective.

'Look at the difference in skills.'

"Ack!"

"Ahhh!"

Gen was on a completely different level compared to them.

It was like Alp's Shiro attacking Park Deok-Gu, Jo Hye-Jin playing chess against me, or Commander Jin talking about business in front of me.

"S-S-Stop!" the short-tempered man shouted.

"…"

"Are you trying to make the Blue Guild your enemy?!" the short-tempered man questioned.

'That's right. He knows he can't win, so he brings up the Blue Guild. He's become a typical villain.'

Gen finally noticed the seal on their chests and frowned. He was probably trying to assess the situation. He had just obtained a ton of information using the presence of the Blue Guild's Republic branch member as the clue.

In the end, he reached a conclusion and concluded that something was wrong.

I had been eyeing the new recruits, and I saw that their leader looked nervous while staring at Gen.

'At least he's not dumb.'

He had finally realized that Gen was far more powerful than him.

'What will you do?'

I was sure the realization was what led to him screaming the Blue Guild's name.

He didn't want to use the Blue Guild's name this way, especially when he was still a rookie, but he had no choice.

Gen was like a towering mountain to him.

There were many hidden experts on the continent, but they had just encountered one of the most powerful figures throughout the continent. Even if all of them were to charge at him at once, they wouldn't be able to handle even Gen's wings.

"You disgusting fools."

"…"

The onlookers were getting noisy.

"What's going on?!"

"Where's security?!"

"The members of the Blue Guild are fighting someone. That man just punched the other man."

"S-Should we report this? What should we do? That man…"

"I think I've seen him from somewhere…"

Quite a few of the onlookers were recording the scene using their hand mirrors.

Gen seemed to have realized that as well, but he was so furious that his head was muddled. He had no idea what to do. I could understand Gen's feelings, as I knew that feeling as well.

'Your head and your actions aren't in sync. There's a fire burning inside you, and you feel like you'll explode if you don't let it out. Ah, that rookie has the same expression as him.'

'Hey, friends. I'm back.'

"You trashy bastards," Gen said.

"Do you have any idea what you've done? We're members of the Blue Guild. I don't know what business you have with us, but you're making a mistake right now," the short-tempered man said.

"Yeah, I know," Gen said.

Boom!

The short-tempered man was slammed into the wall.

Gen didn't really throw him that hard, but the thunderous boom was so loud that I got worried for the short-tempered man.

Still, it seemed that the throw wasn't that hard, as the short-tempered man could still talk.

"*Ahh…* S-Spare me… Please stop…" the short-tempered man begged.

"You committed a sin that cannot be washed," Gen said.

"I don't know what's going on… but how dare you persecute an innocent man!" the short-tempered man shouted.

"Innocent? Are you saying you're not at fault after looking at this man?" Gen said, pointing at me.

"That—man… *whoo…* It seems like there's been a misunderstanding. I'm sure… there was a misunderstanding… If you tell me which guild you're from, I'll make plans to

officially apologize to you later," the leader offered.

"…"

"If you need an apology, I can compensate with physical items…" the leader added.

'No. I don't want gold this time.'

"You… pieces of trash…" Gen mumbled.

'That actually made him more mad.'

"Mr. Gen…" I said.

"Please wait a moment," Gen said.

"Mr. Gen!" I shouted.

"I…"

"Mr. Gen! Please stop!" I yelled.

"…"

"You can stop now!" I told him.

'Don't stop, damn it. Hit them more and show them your strength.'

"Don't hurt them anymore," I begged.

'Hurt them. Crush their bones and tear their skin. I think I got a bruise. It hurts a lot. This isn't enough to calm me down. I think there's a crack in my bone. My ribs hurt a lot. Pay them back fourfold! No, fortyfold! Kill them! Rip them to pieces!'

"But…"

"Let's just… leave," I suggested.

'We should run before security gets here but serve them a few more knuckle sandwiches before we leave.'

“I’m fine, Mr. Gen. I—”

“How can you say that you’re fine every time?” Gen interrupted.

“I’m really fine,” I reassured him.

‘Why do the rookie members look like that? Their nervous look is making them look like the same person to me. Of course, I’m still the same beggar earlier.’

“I don’t know what you’re after… but the Blue Guild won’t overlook this incident,” the leader said.

‘The Blue Guild will overlook this. You’re the one who won’t overlook this. Don’t use the guild’s name like that. You’re so arrogant.’

“L-Let’s go, Mr. Gen. Please… *Heuk…* Please…” I cried.

‘I don’t want to go back to the birdcage. I don’t want to hurt people any longer. But man, don’t hold it in. Punish those fools.’

Gen seemed unable to ignore my tears because he lowered his hand and grabbed my hand.

“Don’t forget. The Blue Guild will never overlook this!”

‘Just shut up, man. You’re so loud.’

The scared dog among the rookies finally became quiet.

“I’m sorry. Mr. Lee Ki-Young… I’m sorry,” Gen said.

“It’s fine. You don’t need to apologize for anything. Then…” I paused.

“I think we should… leave the city,” Gen suggested.

‘No, I don’t think we can leave. Commander Jin has already organized his troops.’

As expected, they were closing in on us, but the Heretic Inquisitors or the Holy Knights were nowhere to be seen.

However, I was sure they'd soon come flooding in from the warp gate.

"This way!"

"I'm sorry. I… *Heuk…* I'm sorry, Mr. Gen," I cried.

"It's not your fault, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," Gen said.

'I think we'll end up running away into the night.'

'Many people are keeping tabs on the ongoing situation, right?'

* * *

"Guild Master, I apologize for contacting you so late. T-There's something I need to tell you. We got into an accident today—Huh? Oh… I-I'm sorry"

—…

"I thought it was nothing more than an argument… but it looks like there's another guild involved. Their goal is unknown, but they're systematically targeting the guild…

"Yes, that's right. We ran into him exactly three times… It's like he knew where we were… Yes, yes… I'll notify the Commander first—What? Ah… yes. It's more like he's after the Blue Guild, not us… I'm sorry. My incompetence has stained the guild's honor… I'm sorry, Guild Master."

—…

"The exact details… Yes. About the video that's spreading on Benigoa Net… I'm sorry. Please forgive me. P-Please kill me."

—…

"What?"

—…

"I'm sorry. I… didn't hear you. Did you just say Mr. Ki-Young? Who is…"

—…

—…

—…

Click.

CHAPTER 938
GEN (17)

The atmosphere of the city was changing so rapidly that I could feel it.

Everyone realized that something big was going on.

Gen's expression was also telling me that the situation was turning for the worse.

The city was sealed by a huge semi-transparent veil.

The guards and the adventurers in the city were moving based on the orders that they had received. Reinforcements were flooding in through the warp gate, and every single exit was locked. The civilians in the city were pretty flustered, which was quite realistic.

'Commander Jin is doing a good job.'

The mood was important in situations like this.

'Look. He's determined not to let even a single ant leave the city.'

The peaceful city instantly became similar to a battlefield, and it seemed like a stage was made.

"This way."

"Martial law has been declared in the city! We ask that you follow the army's instructions!" a soldier announced.

'He even declared martial law?'

"W-What's going on?" a civilian asked.

"Are you allowed to do this? If you do this—"

“Please follow our instructions!” a soldier interrupted.

“Do you know who I am?!” the civilian shouted.

‘There’s always someone who asks stupid questions, but they’ll soon end up getting suppressed.’

“Shut up and follow our instructions, you fool,” said a large-framed soldier.

The uncooperative civilian immediately went quiet.

The civilians were moving and being questioned without knowing what was going on. I was sure the soldiers were asking them if they had seen Gen or not. If they had, then the soldiers would ask when they saw Gen and where.

“Can you tell us what’s going on?” a civilian asked.

“I’m sorry, but it’s top secret,” a soldier replied.

“…”

“If you cooperate, you’ll be able to return to your homes soon,” the soldier informed.

“Hey! How are things over there?” a soldier asked.

“The commander has taken over operational control. He said he’s on his way to the site…” a soldier responded.

“Damn it… we should handle this quickly. What is the partner guild doing? Come over here! Control the civilians and make sure not a single person gets out of here!” a soldier commanded.

Everyone was busy, and it was all because they were worried about Commander Jin’s reaction. It seemed that Commander Jin had truly become a symbolic figure of the Republic. A few years ago, people were pointing fingers at him, calling him “Demon Summoner,” but he became a great hero in just a few years.

‘He really needs to treat me well.’

‘The Hero of Shadows… his title alone sends a shiver down anyone’s spine.’

Obviously, his fame wasn't limited to the Republic. The Sacred Democratic Country—no, the entire continent knew of his existence, so I was sure that Gen had heard of him as well.

They had never met, but the Republic was the Sacred Democratic Country's enemy… so I was sure he was at least aware of the Republic's major figures.

As expected, Gen revealed a solemn face.

His solemn face was telling me that I was right.

'He's probably thinking that Commander Jin can't be an easy opponent.'

"I think the commander of the Republic is coming here, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," Gen said.

"*Ah…* when you say the commander…" I paused.

"It won't be easy," Gen said.

"W-Will we be okay?" I asked.

"…"

Gen couldn't answer with confidence.

"…"

"Let's move," Gen suggested.

We didn't have many choices.

It was almost impossible to escape discreetly or wait until security had loosened up.

The security was so tight, as they had made an extreme move of sealing the entire city.

It was pretty effective.

If the city's manager were an idiot, there'd be openings, but the Commander of the Republic wouldn't have an opening like that. He was thorough, so it was impossible

to escape the well-woven spider web without making a single noise.

Our only option was…

'To brute-force our way out… '

We could show ourselves, and weak spots would certainly appear in this intricate spider web. Security was tight, but not everyone was perfect. His underlings or even the Blue Guild members could end up doing something that would reveal a gap for us to exploit.

The city guards and clans throughout the city were part of his operation, but there were bound to be variables to this perfect system of his, as the parts that make up the system were just humans.

Gen seemed to have reached the same conclusion as me. He carried me with one hand and started running away. The people around us turned their attention to us, and that was when Gen spread his wings and flew at a low altitude across the city.

'Why is he so fast?'

He was slower than Kim Hyun-Sung, but he was fast.

'Can Jin Cheong even stop him?'

Our Commander Jin was weak when it came to something like this. He was even defeated by the tactical Kim Hyun-Sung, and the same thing could happen this time as well.

"Shit! After them!" a soldier shouted.

"We found our target! Target found!" another soldier shouted.

"Move!"

Everyone reacted immediately. Perhaps it was for the safety of the hostage, but they didn't use any offensive-type spells against Gen.

However, a deluge of binding spells swept toward Gen.

Masked rangers chased after us, and there were also moths blocking Gen's path.

Of course, they were too weak to stop Gen here.

"*Gah! Ack!*"

"Request reinforcements! Reinforcements! Capture them somehow!" a soldier shouted.

"We're moving. The target is still on the move!" they exclaimed.

They weren't out to kill us; they simply wanted to suppress us.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young, are you okay?" Gen asked.

"Y-Yes, I'm fine, Mr. Gen. Are you hurt anywhere?" I asked.

Gen covered my face with a blanket.

A cacophony of explosions pierced my ears, and I could imagine just what kind of battle was happening right now. I was sure they were chasing us like dozens of wild dogs hunting one prey.

Their stamina and mentality were getting exhausted at breakneck speeds. They couldn't afford to injure me, after all, which was definitely mentally draining.

It seemed like we were doing a good job at escaping, but that wasn't really the case.

'I think we're getting cornered.'

They were forcing us to move to a certain area.

To make things worse, this fool had yet to realize that he had fallen for their trap.

"*Whoo… whoo…*"

"Mr. Gen!" I shouted.

"It's fine, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," Gen said.

An arrow had grazed his arm.

He changed directions, and I would have done the same if it hadn't been for my Telescope. Yes, I would have suggested this route. His decision wasn't so bad, but it was actually disadvantageous to us.

They were probably waiting for us at the end of this path.

'It's nice to appear at the last and decisive moment.'

Once we were cornered, I felt like Gen would raise one arm and reveal an annoying smile, saying, *"This is the end," or "Did you think you could escape from my trap?"*

I could already imagine Gen revealing a smile filled with despair before saying, *"Let the game begin."*

'Ah, I should have asked him to bring those fools from earlier. They need to eat more knuckle sandwiches.'

Especially the one who had left a bruise on my face.

'At this point, I'm sure they're in a desperate situation as well.'

— That… beggar was the sub guild master? I-I'm sure you've misunderstood it. That's… It can't be. I-I'm sure you're mistaken. You mean the Honorary Cardinal of the Democratic Country was that crazy jerk?"

— Are you sure you explained the situation correctly?

— I think I made a mistake…

—…

— It must've been a call for help, and I misunderstood us. He made contact with us three times, and they were all desperate calls for help…

I wasn't familiar with this script, but anyone could tell that what I had done was a call for help. It was a call for help to get away from this criminal's dirty hands and to no longer suffer horrible things as this criminal's captive.

I had dragged my weak body to ask the Blue Guild for help, but the new guild members ignored it and even misunderstood it.

I was certain that everyone would find it hard to imagine just how hopeless… I had to have felt at the time. They had even insulted me by calling me a beggar, and they even punched me.

I was sure they were aware of my identity at the time.

— What do we do?

—…

—…

— Regardless of the incident… how are we going to handle… his rage?

'He said, "his rage." That's such an old expression. I guess Commander Jin has been too strict these days. He should have been a bit kinder on them.'

— The guild master won't forgive us.

"…"

"…"

'Guild Master? What about Commander Jin?'

I activated my Telescope and saw Commander Jin.

— I didn't know either. Damn it! Why me?! Damn it!

'Who is Cheongie hyung talking to?'

— You crazy bastard! Damn it! I'm taking my hands off of this one. I shouldn't have gotten involved with you guys. You're just fools who rush in by relying only on your strength and nothing else!

— How dare you… You're nothing but beasts who don't recognize my kindness in taking care of you! How dare you! Say something like that? The thief[1] mentioned in

that old saying are fools like you! You dirty and disgusting fool. I'm incompetent? Me?

'Oh, did you guys fight? Did Hyun-Sung say something?'

BOOM!

I felt weightless, and I felt like I was flying somewhere.

I could feel the flow of mana around me, so I spoke, "A-Are you okay?"

"…"

"Mr. Gen?" I called out.

"Mr. Ki-Young."

I heard a different voice. I looked up and saw a familiar face. It had been a while since I saw that face.

"Hyun-Sung?" I asked.

I saw his handsome and angry face.

I had no idea what exactly was going on, so I just decided to cry first as if I was hurt.

"Gen… I mean… M-Mr. Hyun-Sung," I mumbled.

'I'll just cry for now.'

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1. Proverb: Save a thief from the gallows, and he'll become your enemy ☜

CHAPTER 939
GEN (18)

I would be able to determine the direction of the situation by crying first, and Kim Hyun-Sung would also make his own conclusions as to why I was crying.

I cried, hoping he'd find the answer, but I was also startled to see him here.

'Damn it, what the hell?'

What was that incompetent Commander Jin doing? How come he didn't stop him from coming here? Was he contacted by those new recruits? It was highly likely.

Many different thoughts popped up into my head, and the script had taken a turn so suddenly that my mind couldn't keep up with it.

However, there was a really high chance that those foolish recruits had contacted Kim Hyun-Sung directly. They had to have considered Gen's actions as a challenge to the Blue Guild, which meant it wasn't strange that Kim Hyun-Sung was contacted about it.

Kim Hyun-Sung knew what the guild meant to me, so I was sure he had emphasized many times to the recruits just how important the guild's honor was. If they had determined that today's incident was serious enough to destroy the guild's honor, they probably had no choice but to contact him directly.

'They had no idea that they were simply digging their own holes… Did Kim Hyun-Sung recognize me through the video that's being shared throughout Benigoa Net right now?'

How the hell did he even recognize me?

I was convinced that upon seeing the video, he rushed to Jin Cheong and acted like a child before making a beeline for my current location.

Kim Hyun-Sung wouldn't have noticed us if we had tried to get out of here quietly,

but the entire city had announced that we were here, so it wasn't strange for him to know about it as well.

In addition to completely destroying the stage that Commander Jin had created, he also took the lead role for himself.

'Commander Jin is probably disappointed.'

He had to be disappointed by the fact that he couldn't speak his famous lines. I shook my head unknowingly while thinking about useless things like to escape reality temporarily.

And that was when Kim Hyun-Sung's thoughts filled my head.

[What the heck? His arm is so thin… he's just skin and bones…]

'No, it's not that bad.'

[What the hell? He looks terrible… Can he even move properly?]

'Do I look that *bad?'*

His thoughts filled my head in real time, and he started having many thoughts as soon as he held me in his arms. I was crying, and I looked both horrible and weak.

'I definitely look worse than I thought.'

It was kind of awkward evaluating myself through another person's eyes, but I was sure I had lost a lot of weight because I couldn't remember the last time I ate a decent meal.

I'd often eat just a little before putting my spoon down.

The situation had improved a bit, but the traces of suffering were still there.

In addition, my fingers were swollen due to the intense house chores that I had been doing these days. I was trying to pretend that I was working hard as well, so I ended up having a lot of injuries from sewing and cooking.

I treated them using holy power, but I had to wrap them with bandages as a way to

show them off. I would either stab myself while sewing or cut myself while cooking, as my character background stated that I had never really done such chores.

In other words, I had to be clumsy when it came to cooking and sewing.

'That's right, Hyun-Sung. My skin has also become really dry.'

The products that Lee Ji-Hye had sent me gave me really elastic, healthy, and pure white skin, but my current skin had lost all of its moisture. Actually, it wasn't *that* bad, but there was a clear difference compared to before this incident.

'Yeah, I have chapped lips, damn it.'

My gaze looked empty.

It was like I had given up on life, and my gaze seemed to be telling him the hardships I had to endure upon getting kidnapped by Gen. I was sure that Kim Hyun-Sung wouldn't be able to imagine the things I had gone through—the humiliation, the disgrace, and the pain I had to endure.

He wouldn't be able to guess the things I had to experience.

'Actually, that didn't really happen. It's just that his imagination runs wild at times like this.'

I could tell Kim Hyun-Sung was thinking about every single possible scenario. He was biting his lips hard, and it seemed that he couldn't control his strength right now, as his lips were bleeding.

He was about to remove the blanket on me, but he stopped.

When I saw his expression, I frowned and quickly covered myself. Was it because I didn't want to show my miserable appearance to the public?

Was it because I didn't want to show my bedraggled appearance to the denizens because they were looking up to me? I was sure Kim Hyun-Sung felt bad because all he could do was cover his wounded friend using a cursed, tattered blanket.

It had been a while since he saw such a blanket around me.

[Those bastards.]

'Yeah, those bastards beat me up. I have bruises all over me, and I broke some bones as well. They were so violent that they even focused their attacks on my face, so my face would look really swollen.'

Regardless, I was still smiling.

'Yeah, stay strong, Ki-Young.'

'Hyun-Sung, don't ever forget those bastards. They're really unforgivable.'

"M-Mr. Ki-Young…" Kim Hyun-Sung mumbled.

"…"

I decided to stay quiet for now.

"Mr. Ki-Young… are you okay? W-What in the world…" Kim Hyun-Sung stuttered.

It sounded like Kim Hyun-Sung was at a loss for words, and he was already overflowing with rage and shame. Now that I thought about it, I had a limp, but I couldn't show him that, as I was in his arms.

"Why did you not call…" Kim Hyun-Sung trailed off.

'Ah, I have my reason for that.'

One of my eyes was injured. I was talking about the gift that the Goddess had bestowed upon me using the bond between Kim Hyun-Sung and me as the primary crafting material. My gold eye was also a symbol that would notify me whenever we were connected, but it had lost its light a long time ago.

I couldn't open one of my eyes properly.

Actually, my gold eye was just symbolic, but I could use it as a reason why I couldn't contact him.

"…"

Kim Hyun-Sung's face slowly became grim.

'Uh.'

The air around me was distorting along with his face. His face was so distorted that I wondered whether it was actually possible for him to make that kind of face. It was only for a moment, but…

'What the hell? You scared me.'

"I'm sorry," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"…"

"I'm… I'm sorry about everything," Kim Hyun-Sung added.

'No, you have nothing to apologize for.'

"I'm really… really sorry. I—"

"I-It's fine, Mr. Hyun-Sung," I said, interrupting him.

"I-"

"I knew you'd come," I told him.

I was honestly hoping you wouldn't come.

"If I… came sooner…" Kim Hyun-Sung muttered.

"And this is my fault… so you don't have to apologize for anything," I said.

"Please… please hold on a little longer," Kim Hyun-Sung begged.

That was when I heard a loud voice…

"Let go of his hand."

Ah, right. He was here as well. Obviously, I flinched upon unconsciously recalling how this dirty kidnapper had been playing around with me.

I could still remember the suffering I had to withstand in that deserted, moldy room where we had to eat pig porridge every day. And I could still remember how I struggled against the dirty, muddy water that flooded that room every day.

There was also that moldy blanket…

"I said let go of his hand," Gen repeated.

"…"

"I told you to let go of his hand!" Gen shouted.

"Is it him?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

"What?"

"Is he… the culprit behind why you look like this?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

It's a long story, so… I'll just cry for now.

Gen revealed a desperate look and spread his wings.

Our Hyun-Sung unsheathed his sword while biting his lips.

Gen was definitely strong—he was stronger than an ordinary human being, as he had received Benigoa's power. He had also been desperately honing his sword techniques, and he was overflowing with talent as well.

He was so talented that he was transferred to the Vatican, and he had grown powerful upon receiving a ton of resources from the Vatican. Overall, Gen was powerful.

'Unfortunately, our Hyun-Sung is stronger.'

Low-altitude flight seemed to be his specialty, as he charged at Kim Hyun-Sung and flew so low to the ground that I thought he'd collide with it.

Kim Hyun-Sung took a stance and got ready to attack.

'It's been a while since I saw him fight.'

BOOM!

A thunderous boom echoed as Gen was blasted several kilometers away, eventually crashing into a building.

'Shit. This is why I didn't want to call Kim Hyun-Sung.'

Kabooooooooom!!!

Of course, Gen didn't fly several kilometers away without colliding with anything. Every single building unfortunate enough to collide with him crumbled almost immediately.

'Uh… '

Boom!

Gen didn't seem to care about the roads or the buildings as he stepped out into the open.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young!" Gen screamed, stretching his hand out toward me, but he was blasted away again.

BOOM!

The city was destroyed in an instant.

'I'm sorry, Commander Jin. Damn it.'

Had he expected this to happen?

The city was so empty that I couldn't see even a single ant.

The civilians and troops were evacuated.

There were some people around, and I could see that they were trying to control the situation, but they couldn't even approach the two.

Of course, I didn't really think that they wanted to stop the two. Actually, they *could* stop them, but it was more like they couldn't do it. They were aware that this was out

of their hands at this point.

'They've given up on the city.'

The famous landmark of the city—a large tower in the city center—collapsed to the ground upon getting split into two by Kim Hyun-Sung's sword.

Gen desperately fought back Kim Hyun-Sung.

Even the temple in the city was destroyed, and I was sure that it was only a matter of time before the city was reduced to a wasteland.

Even the city walls were in the middle of a collapse…

I was glad that Jung Ha-Yan wasn't here, but the damage was really extensive.

I felt like I was watching children fighting on top of a sand castle. Actually, the two couldn't even be compared, as I was sure that this sight filled people with more despair than watching a sandcastle fall apart upon getting stepped on.

— Damn it! Lee Ki-Young, you bastard! Damn it!

"Are you watching, Commander?"

— Damn it! What are you…

"I told you to take care of Hyun-Sung, didn't I? And you couldn't even do that? You're so incompetent… What can you even do? Do you really think I can put you in charge of projects with how incompetent you are?"

— You crazy fool! Do you really think that you're in the position to say that?!

'Stop it, man, I'm already having a headache.'

I muted the communication channel and focused on the fight between Gen and Kim Hyun-Sung.

'What should I do?'

BOOM!

‘I’ve grown fond of him since we lived together for quite a while, after all. He’s still kind of useful as well.’

“*Ahhh!*”

‘Should I just cut ties with him here? I guess he’s pretty embarrassing to associate myself with.’

Craaaaaaack!

‘Do I still need more information about the dungeon? Still, the least I can do is bring Gen to court so he can maintain his honor until the end. It might be better to send him off painlessly and with his honor intact.’

“Bastard!” Kim Hyun-Sung shouted.

“Someone like you… will never know his pain… *Kgh!*” Gen yelled.

‘Uh… ‘

Kabooooooom!

‘Ah.’

Craaaaaack!

“*Kgh!*”

Booooooooooooom!

‘You’re going to kill him, man… ‘

Kim Hyun-Sung was no longer using his sword. At some point, he had let go of his sword and was just beating Gen to a pulp. It was like I was watching Cha Hee-Ra—no, it was more like I was staring at Doom Hyun-Sung.

I checked to see if he had a tail and if his expression had become icy cold, but there wasn’t anything like that. Kim Hyun-Sung was just displaying what pure violence looked like without using any of his skills.

He was just taking his anger out on Gen, and his one and only goal was to inflict as much pain as possible on Gen.

Gen was resisting, but it was pretty much useless.

His Endurance had to be pretty high, as he was doing a great job withstanding Kim Hyun-Sung's attacks, but the fact that he was still alive despite such a beating made him appear really pitiful.

"W-Wait…" I muttered.

'You're really going to kill him at this rate.'

Kabooooooooom!

"Bastard!" Kim Hyun-Sung shouted.

Crack!

"P-Please stop, Mr. Hyun-Sung!" I shouted.

CHAPTER 940
GEN (19)

'I think Gen is still useful.'

He knew the dungeon's location, he had a direct connection to the Mole Saint's Cozy Sanctuary, and he'd be helpful in clearing it.

In addition, I needed a culprit to show to the public.

I needed someone to take responsibility for this incident.

Actually, Gen's survival didn't really matter to me, but the public would think otherwise. I also just couldn't announce that the guy who was supposed to appear in public had died under mysterious circumstances.

Gen had committed a worldwide felony, which meant that anyone had the license to kill him on the spot. I was sure that no one would complain even if Hyun-Sung ended up sending Gen to Benigoa's side, but if possible, it would be more effective to let the law handle him.

'He did *commit a crime worthy of death… '*

However, a miserable death under Kim Hyun-Sung's fists in a random deserted building was just a bit too much, which was why I decided to stop Kim Hyun-Sun.

I didn't do that out of the bond, friendship, and brotherhood between Gen and me. I was simply worried that Kim Hyun-Sung's anger would consume him. Thankfully, Kim Hyun-Sung stood up and looked down at the guy that he had beaten to a pulp.

Gen looked startled by the sudden respite, and his fists trembled upon realizing that I had saved him. He felt overwhelmingly helpless. Although he had suggested that we travel the world and look at the beautiful sceneries of the continent, we hadn't really done any of that.

Of course, it was all because I was dying, but it wouldn't change the fact that we had

yet to do any of what he had suggested to me.

Now that I thought about it, he had never really done anything for me.

I couldn't choose anything for myself even in my final moments. If the Guild Master of the Blue Guild were to drag me away, I'd be locked up in a birdcage again, and I would never get to spread my wings until the day I die.

The Honorary Cardinal of the Sacred Democratic Country, who'd laugh even at the smallest thing, would choose to live as the God of Sacrifice of Revival.

Gen couldn't just stand by and let that happen; he'd rather die than let that happen.

With that in mind, he got up and swung his fist.

A criminal's cowardly sucker punch would never hit its mark, and Gen's fist didn't even reach our hero.

Kim Hyun-Sung's basic defense stance was enough to stop Gen's powerful fist.

Gen seemed to have thought that he had a chance because he lashed out with his leg, but Kim Hyun-Sung's thick arms easily withstood his kick.

Even if Gen were in perfect health, there was no guarantee that his kick just now would hit Kim Hyun-Sung.

"Damn it… damn it!" Gen shouted. He cursed with everything he had, but his attacks couldn't reach Kim Hyun-Sung at all. There was a clear difference in their strength, and Gen couldn't do anything other than make the city restoration efforts become even more expensive and complex.

In the end, Gen collapsed first. He was so immersed in this role that I wouldn't be surprised if he cried.

As expected, he started crawling toward me while crying.

"I'm sorry… I'm… sorry," Gen said while crying.

"Please stop, Mr. Hyun-Sung," I begged.

"…"

"Please stop," I repeated.

"…"

"Please stop, Mr. Hyun-Sung!" I shouted.

Kim Hyun-Sung wasn't planning on stopping, but he ended up stopping and cast a confused gaze at me.

"But… why?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

'What do you mean why? Is he out of his mind? Is it okay to beat someone to death when we're not even at war? Really? I mean, you can, but you should still hold it in.'

"It's not his fault," I answered.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young…" Gen muttered.

"It's not his fault. I asked him… to leave with me. He was simply fulfilling my wishes," I added.

It didn't actually happen, but I needed to build up the story.

Obviously, Kim Hyun-Sung looked utterly confused. He also couldn't accept the idea that I wanted to leave the Sacred Democratic Country and the Blue Guild. Of course, I didn't think Kim Hyun-Sung was going to easily accept that story.

My trembling voice seemed to have told him that I was lying, but of course, I made my voice tremble on purpose.

I looked so bedraggled that there was no way I'd go out there and show myself to the public, much less ask someone to leave with me.

The idea was so absurd that it couldn't even be considered a joke.

There weren't any variables, but Kim Hyun-Sung seemed to have recalled a certain psychological response, and he looked like he couldn't accept the possibility that his assumption was correct.

“Mr. Ki-Young, have you ever…” Kim Hyun-Sung trailed off.

“…”

“Have you ever heard of Stockholm syndrome?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

“…”

“…”

‘Of course, I’ve heard of that.’

“What?” I asked.

“Apparently, Stockholm syndrome describes the psychological condition of a victim who begins to identify and empathize with their captor. Maybe you—”

“That’s not the case,” I interrupted him.

Our time was short, but our friendship was real.

I wasn’t experiencing that kind of psychological response.

‘And even if I’m experiencing that syndrome, did he really think I’d say yes and acknowledge it? He should consider the possibility of me becoming hostile toward him. He needs to be more cautious when dealing with the mentally ill.

“It’s nothing like that. I just…” I trailed off.

“If you’re going to punish Mr. Gen, you’ll have to punish me as well,” I added.

Gen had actually committed a crime, but…

“This man is a criminal,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

‘Hey, don’t listen to me.’

“He made you suffer,” Kim Hyun-Sung added.

‘I know you always say yes, but don’t say yes this time. You have to be assertive. Am I

really in the condition to make a reasonable judgement here? I mean, come on. Just look at me.

'I look like I'll collapse to the ground at any moment, so do you really think that someone like that can think properly? You've got to learn how to be blunt when necessary, man.'

"It's my fault, Mr. Hyun-Sung. He did nothing wro—"

"You look like skin and bones, and it's this man's fault!" Kim Hyun-Sung exclaimed.

'Yeah, get angry. Keep shouting.'

"You're not in the condition to make any reasonable decision. Even if you don't agree with my actions right now, you'll eventually understand that I was right. It doesn't matter if you resent me right now, as you will eventually…" Kim Hyun-Sung trailed off.

Templar Gen was poison, and I was sure Kim Hyun-Sung believed that he wasn't supposed to exist.

On the other hand, Gen looked touched. Templar Gen was crying, but was he crying because I was protecting him, or was he crying because he was in a hopeless situation?

His crying was so good that he could win the Best Actor Award.

Furious Kim Hyun-Sung didn't look so bad either, but Gen's face was filled with complicated emotions such as—regret, gratitude, and pain, along with other emotions that I couldn't really deduce.

"R-Run, Mr. Lee Ki-Young!" Gen exclaimed.

"…"

"I'll hold him back. Run as far as you can!" Gen shouted.

He was really cool right now, but I was too weak to do that.

He was skilled at talking as well. I was really impressed by his confidence when he

said something along the lines of showing me the beautiful sceneries of the continent.

The results of his efforts were disappointing, though, like the pig porridge and that moldy deserted building.

I was sure this time wouldn't be any different.

"*Kgh!* Hurry up and run!" Gen repeated.

'Hey, how can I run from Kim Hyun-Sung? Stop talking nonsense. That's impossible.'

"Don't worry about me… Hurry!" Gen yelled.

He was putting on a one-man show.

"Come at me!" Gen provoked.

'You'll die if Kim Hyun-Sung goes to you. You should tell him not to come to you.'

Kim Hyun-Sung was shocked and angry. He was also filled with pure malice because he couldn't understand why I had decided to take Gen's side, even though Gen was the one who had reduced me to mere skin and bones.

Kim Hyun-Sung was so angry that he was struggling to suppress his fury.

Kim Hyun-Sung was right; he had always been making the wrong choices, but he finally made the right choice this time.

The right choice here was to kill Gen and set me free.

Kim Hyun-Sung was silent while Gen got ready to fight—thinking that this was going to be his final battle.

When Kim Hyun-Sung unsheathed his sword with the mindset to kill Gen with one strike, I got goosebumps all over my back.

"Don't do it!" I shouted.

'Don't kill him!'

Kim Hyun-Sung was really scary whenever he was full of killing intent.

I was trembling unconsciously like an aspen tree, but I gathered my strength and shouted, “That’s right, Mr. Hyun-Sung! You’re right.”

“What?” Kim Hyun-Sung questioned.

“He really did kidnap me,” I added.

“…”

“It’s also true that he kidnapped me and brought me here. I won’t deny it anymore,” I added.

Gen didn’t look like I had betrayed him. Perhaps it was because he had realized that I was doing this for him and that I had no choice but to do this to save him from Kim Hyun-Sung.

“Don’t use your powers like this,” I begged.

“…”

“He has the right to a fair trial, Mr. Hyun-Sung,” I told him.

‘Yeah, this is the build-up I was talking about.’

“Even if his crime is unforgivable, he still deserved a fair trial and a chance to defend himself. You’re about to do something controversial under continental law. If Mr. Gen really deserves punishment, we must go through the correct procedure,” I explained.

“…”

I was too weak right now, but I stepped forward with dignity and spread my arms dramatically. It was like I was telling him that I was going to defend Gen and that I couldn’t let him die like this. The production value was truly great and excellent.

“*Ah… uh? Ah… uh…*”

‘He looks strange now… ‘

"*Uh… ah…*"

'What's wrong, Kim Hyun-sung? You're not broken, are you? You're okay, right?'

"The Sacred Democratic Country and the Vatican must be the ones to punish him, Mr. Hyun-Sung," I added.

"*Ah…*"

Kim Hyun-Sung didn't say anything. Perhaps because he was too shocked, but he seemed like he was denying reality.

His face was distorted, and he was mumbling strange things to himself. It was like someone precious to him had been taken away by a bunch of thugs, and he couldn't do anything about it.

"*Uh…?*"

"Mr. Hyun-Sung, I'm sorry, but this isn't right," I said and ran over to Gen.

"…"

I crouched and whispered to Gen, "This is the only way, Mr. Gen."

"There's no need to… You don't need to fight for me, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. What I want… is for you to be free…" Gen said.

"I'm already free thanks to you, Mr. Gen. It's now my turn to protect you," I told him.

'What a cliche.'

"I'm going to defend you," I added.

'Yeah, I'm not.'

"I'll protect you," I said.

'Yeah, I won't.'

"So…" I paused.

'You have to tell me everything you know. You have to do that for you to win the upcoming trial.

'You need to tell me everything, including how you obtained your wings, the location of the Mole Saint's Cozy Sanctuary, the dungeon's clear requirements, Simon's true identity, and the location of the other Templars.'

I bit my lips while staring at Gen.

"We'll overcome this crisis together," I said.

'Actually, I don't think I will.'

CHAPTER 941
GEN (20)

“Mr. Ki-Young…” Kim Hyun-Sung called out.

“…”

“Mr. Ki-Young, are you available?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

“I’m sorry, but Father Lee Ki-Young said he doesn’t want to see anyone right now…” a holy knight said to him.

“Please tell him that I’m here,” Kim Hyun-Sung requested.

“I already did, but he said he didn’t want to see anyone. I’m sorry, Master,” the holy knight told him.

“Mr. Ki-Young!” Kim Hyun-Sung shouted.

“I’m sorry, but…”

“Let go of me!” Kim Hyun-Sung yelled.

“Please have some dignity, Master,” the holy knight said.

I heard loud noises outside. I heard Kim Hyun-Sung shouting my name, but I didn’t really care. If I weren’t the one explicitly denying visitors, he would kick the door open.

‘Unfortunately, he can’t do anything about it, as I’m the one who doesn’t want to meet anyone.’

I was in the middle of a very confusing time. I was minimizing contact with the outside world, excluding Jung Ha-Yan, and I avoided exposure to the media as much as possible.

There were only a few people aware that I was kidnapped.

Was it because they thought that my miserable life of eating pig porridge had tainted my honor, or was it because they didn't want to show the world that they were incompetent?

The Vatican was really against letting the media know about the truth.

It was also the reason I didn't want to meet Kim Hyun-Sung. They announced to the public that I was taking a break, and I went along with them by minimizing contact with other people, telling everyone that I had yet to recover from the shock.

Of course, Kim Hyun-Sung didn't feel that way.

He was preparing for the trial of the worst criminal to have ever existed—Templar Gen's trial. However, I was sure he was disappointed in himself as well. He was mentally unstable because he was scared of losing his brother whom he had a deep connection with.

The revived Kim Hyun-Sung was really obsessed with our bond, so I could see why he was acting kind of strange.

He was deeply shaken by the fact that a random insignificant fool had somehow managed to take his position away as my brother.

To make things worse, he was a criminal as well.

In Kim Hyun-Sung's eyes, he was a criminal who had hurt me, so I was sure it was hard for him to understand why I was defending the criminal.

He was probably thinking that something had gone wrong somewhere, and he had to find what went wrong and fix it. I wouldn't be surprised if he thought he needed to be by my side because I was in a lot of mental pain.

"He's been like that for three days now. Oppa, Kim Hyun-Sung *is* okay, right?" Lee Ji-Hye asked.

"I can't do anything right now," I replied.

"I ate with him two days ago, and he was just in the worst condition. He looked like

he had lost everything, and there was a cloud over his head… he'd sometimes mumble strange things to himself as well…" Lee Ji-Hye said.

"Mumble strange things to himself?" I asked.

"I was scared, so I couldn't really hear what he was saying, but the light in his eyes had faded away. He looked desperate—like he had been pushed into a corner. He looked like someone on the brink of causing trouble or someone about to commit a crime…

"It's like he'd blow up the moment you mess with him…" Lee Ji-Hye explained.

"But why did you two eat together?" I asked.

"*Ah!* He asked me to join the trial and to side with the Vatican. Apparently, he wants me to be a special prosecutor or something and punish the criminal.

"He said the criminal had to be brought to the gallows no matter what… he said I could just come to the trial, and he'd take care of the paperwork. He'll also pay me handsomely if I help him…

"I'm still not sure about the details of his request, but the remuneration is pretty large. He said he'd pay me several years' salary all at once. I don't really care about gold at this point, but that amount was just astounding," Lee Ji-Hye answered.

'This girl… '

"So what did you do? Did you accept it?" I asked.

"No, I told him I was busy. I would accept it if I weren't so busy. However, I don't really like being on the opposite side of you. However, I think he's going to visit Commander Jin," Lee Ji-Hye replied.

"What?"

"He really wants to see the criminal on the gallows and Commander Jin is pretty skilled when it comes to that. He also enjoys filming court cases. Kim Hyun-Sung seems like he knows that you're going to defend Gen because he's preparing many things. He's working harder than you think behind the scenes," Lee Ji-Hye informed.

"…"

"But… are you really okay?" Lee Ji-Hye asked.

"I told you I'm fine," I answered.

"Your face and skin are horrible right now. Your face and the skin were the only things that were good about you, but look at them now…

"You also lost too much weight. I feel bad now… I had no idea that things would get *this* bad. I thought you were living a good life. Since you were struggling, you really should have said something," Lee Ji-Hye said.

"I really was struggling at the time," I told her.

'It's been a while since Ji-Hye noona felt bad about something.'

In other words, I was definitely in pretty bad shape. I could still remember seeing a speechless Commander Jin when he came to arrest Gen, the worst criminal in history.

I thought he was going to say a bunch of bullshit, but he stayed quiet upon seeing my poor condition. Thanks to his silence, I didn't need to get into a pointless argument, so I could say at the time that my condition was great.

It was to the point that I thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to go around looking like this from time to time.

'People who are normally cold toward me are treating me well right now.'

Of course, I couldn't do that again.

I didn't really want to go out looking for freedom again.

"Do you want more tea?" Lee Ji-Hye asked.

"Yeah," I answered.

It was my dream to live a free life, but it seemed that living inside a birdcage was more enjoyable for me as the Saint of Light.

I finished my half-bath and put on a face mask. Then, I sipped on tea while spending some time with Ji-Hye noona inside a luxury spa.

'Now this is what I call a real break… '

The massive room couldn't be compared to that moldy, deserted building. Rather than a musty smell, the room was filled with sweet-smelling candles as a part of a so-called aromatherapy.

Rather than a harsh discordant mixture of noises, sweet music filled the air. The sensation of the fabric wrapped around me felt really good; my feet and joints weren't throbbing in pain as well.

I also really liked the fact that Ji-Hye noona was treating me better than usual.

"Did our Ki-Young have a really hard time?" Lee Ji-Hye teased.

'But don't treat me like a baby.'

"Do you want a hug?" Lee Ji-Hye asked.

"No. I need to eat and get ready to go out," I told her.

"…"

"…"

"*Hmm,* are you going to Gen?" Lee Ji-Hye asked.

"Yeah, I need to get as much information as I can. It's Mirror Salmon today as well, right?" I asked.

"Yeah. I also brought Rainbow Cotton Candy for dessert, so have your fill," Lee Ji-Hye answered.

It was pointless to compare Mirror Salmon and Rainbow Cotton Candy to Gen's pig porridge.

"The salmon came straight from Mirror Lake rather than from a farm," Lee Ji-Hye added.

“Really?” I asked.

“Yes. Kim Hyun-Sung told me to tell you,” Lee Ji-Hye answered.

‘He’s really dedicated and nice.’

I felt kind of bad. There was no need for him to go that far.

I wanted to explain my situation, but what could I even tell him? I couldn’t tell him that everything was a part of my scheme and that I had been acting all along. I couldn’t tell him that I wanted to turn someone into a criminal and bring him down.

The food melted in my mouth, causing all my complicated thoughts to disappear. It seemed that my stomach had gotten smaller because I quickly became full, but the fact that I was enjoying my meal was enough to make me feel better.

“And the guild is in chaos,” Lee Ji-Hye informed.

“The Blue Guild?” I asked.

“Yeah. Looks like Kim Hyun-Sung has caused quite a commotion while venting out his anger. He started breaking stuff as well. Jung Ha-Yan wasn’t there because she’s preparing for a wedding or something…” Lee Ji-Hye replied.

“How do you know so much?” I asked.

“Because I have an informant. This is so good. I can see why you like it,” Lee Ji-Hye answered.

“I don’t like it *that* much…” I commented.

“You say that, but you looked like you really enjoyed it. By the way… you’re going to start today, right? How are you planning on doing it?” Lee Ji-Hye asked.

“I’m going to go hard and wear all sorts of accessories,” I responded.

Lee Ji-Hye nodded in understanding and smiled.

I could go around wearing comfortable clothes, but this was more effective.

The brighter I shone and the more I acted like the honorary cardinal of the Sacred Democratic Country, the more ashamed Gen would feel.

This outfit was actually the most comfortable outfit for me, but Gen would think that I had become nothing but a mindless doll. He'd probably confess once he saw me in shackles again because he was too incompetent to keep me away from here.

"A beautiful bird inside a birdcage… that's what you want to become, right? A dressed-up doll living according to the wishes and whims of other people. You once desired freedom, but your eyes had lost the light.

"You want to be someone who has no choice but to accept your fate no matter how horrible it is," Lee Ji-Hye asked.

"That's exactly it," I answered.

"You should wear the hat. I'll give you the necklace and rings as well," she suggested.

"Not bad."

My preparations were done, and I got ready to go out.

Dozens of holy knights instantly surrounded me outside, as there was an ongoing concern about the security around the Vatican.

When I saw how Park Lian, Lee Chang-Ryeol, and even Kim Ye-Ri were assigned to protect me, I realized that they were truly worried about the possibility that I could get kidnapped once again.

Kim Ye-Ri raised her hand slightly to greet me, and I did the same. It looked like Kim Ye-Ri was aware of everything, but it was probably because she had participated in Park Deok-Gu's awakening event.

And that was when I heard a voice…

"Where are you headed, Father Lee Ki-Young?" a holy knight asked.

"Please take me to where Mr. Gen is," I answered.

"…" "There's something I would like to hear from him. I'll interrogate him myself and

see what he has to say," I added.

"…"

"I trust that he wasn't tortured, and there weren't any cruel and usual punishments inflicted on him," I said.

I was sure he was constantly being tortured, but Gen definitely hadn't said much to him, as he was pretty good at keeping secrets.

Anyway, the party of holy knights nodded in response to my question.

"Mr. Ki-Young!" someone yelled.

"Mr. Hyun-Sung?"

'You're still here?'

It turned out that he had been waiting outside, waiting for an opportunity to see me.

"Mr. Ki-Young, have you—"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Hyun-Sung. I don't want to see you right now," I interrupted him.

Ji-Hye noona was right. Kim Hyun-Sung looked really horrible.

'I don't think he's been sleeping.'

I couldn't really describe his face, but he looked like he was hanging off a cliff.

He looked really desperate.

"You have your own tasks to handle," I told him.

'You have work to do in the Republic, so why are you here?'

"Those aren't important right now, Mr. Ki-Young," I said.

'If that's not important… Shit. So you randomly picked those guys as guild members because you thought that the tasks I assigned to you weren't important?'

“You have to take care of the new guild members,” I said.

‘Yeah, the ones who hit me. Those bastards.’

“Those… guild members… are no longer part of the guild,” Kim Hyun-Sung informed me.

“What? Did you shut down the Republic branch?” I asked.

“No, t-that’s not what I meant. The new guild members are no longer around,” Kim Hyun-Sung stuttered.

“…”

“It’s hard to explain… but anyway… they’re no longer around,” Kim Hyun-Sung repeated.

‘So where are they? In Heaven?’

“They’re… no longer around,” Kim Hyun-Sung added.

‘Did you… kill them?’

Kim Hyun-Sung’s gaze scared me a bit.

CHAPTER 942
TRIAL (1)

I had no idea just what Kim Hyun-Sung was thinking.

I just knew he was confused and was feeling a variety of emotions at the moment. One thing I managed to confirm was that his gaze was kind of strange, and it was to the point that it reminded me of Jung Ha-Yan during her prime.

'Did you really kill them?'

I looked around using my telescope just in case, but I didn't see them.

I had no idea if they ended up getting buried alive or if they even went to heaven, but the Blue Guild's Republic branch, where I thought I would find them, looked like the scene of a gruesome crime. Things were scattered everywhere, and there wasn't anything intact inside of it as if it were an abandoned building.

The desks and chairs were broken in half…

'That's not blood, is it?'

There were strange stains.

The temporary guild house looked clean from the outside, but it was actually useless for quite some time now. I didn't really think that they would close the guild house because I saw a few staffers, but they looked gloomy.

I heard someone crying from one side of the room while another person was questioning what they were supposed to do now. Despite that, they were still working, but they all looked so desperate that I couldn't even hear them talking to each other.

'What the hell happened?'

I turned my head to act like it was none of my business, but I noticed familiar objects

on the meeting table.

'Empty lunch boxes.'

They looked familiar. Han Sora always carried those around with her, and Jung Ha-Yan always ate from them.

"…"

"…"

'I thought you guys were preparing for a wedding.'

Was Jung Ha-Yan connected to this as well?

I was sure we had already taken care of the kidnapping case. Could it be that they noticed what was going on?

The easiest assumption I could make was that perhaps Kim Hyun-Sung had asked for her help, as killing those guys was easy, but hiding them was hard. Jung Ha-Yan had enough spells in her arsenal to dispose of them. They'd be able to get rid of them easily.

Now that I thought about it…

'I think Jung Ha-Yan isn't the only one who's involved here. Why did Ji-Hye noona lie to me and say that Jung Ha-Yan was preparing for a wedding?'

Lee Ji-Hye was suspicious as well. If she was involved as well, it was highly likely that she had taken care of the paperwork, as there was no way Kim Hyun-Sung could do something like that by himself.

Although it was common for adventurers to go missing or die under suspicious circumstances, the continent never really took action about that. If there was a murder or a missing person case, the police would naturally make a move, and many people would be deployed to investigate the case.

The bigger the case, the more organizations would get involved.

The media would also take an interest in the case.

The disappearance of promising new recruits would definitely attract attention, as those new recruits were the talk of the town.

I heard hiding crimes was nearly impossible these days, and there were also factions observing organizations and groups with a lot of power.

The Continental Protection Management Committee was a great example of that.

There were two ways to make people disappear—use spells or techniques that were imperceptible to the investigation groups and powerful rangers, or let Lee Ji-Hye handle it.

"Max."

— F-Father! It's been a while. I was actually going to greet you with noona…

"Can you find identification or something to prove the identity of the temporary guild members at Blue Guild's Republic branch? Anything is fine. I believe their names are…"

— Y-Yes.

"Did you find something?"

— Y-Yes, but the Republic Branch never picked temporary guild members. I searched using the names you gave me, but nothing came up.

"Are you sure? Search for people who exited the Republic's tutorial dungeon as a raid group."

— There wasn't… a raid party in the Republic's tutorial dungeon recently. That's… what it shows in the logs… Should I look into it more?

"No, it's fine. I'll plan something out with your sister. I love you."

— I-I love…

"Okay, I'll contact you again, Max."

It would be best for me to assume that he used both methods for this incident. Since even the Manager of Benigoa Net had no idea that they existed, then Ji-Hye noona

was definitely involved.

I spent the last three days resting in my room…

'She must've done it back then.'

Kim Hyun-Sung was definitely not the one who had come up with the overall plan. His gaze was kind of strange, but at least he was being nice.

'She wasn't being honest… '

Why would she hide this from me?

"Excuse me… Mr. Ki-Young," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"Yes, Mr. Hyun-Sung?" I answered.

"So… where are you headed right now?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

"I'm going to meet Mr. Gen. I'm worried about his condition," I replied.

"…"

"…" "I'll go with you," Kim Hyun-Sung offered.

"What?"

"I'll protect you in case something happens," he said.

"There's no need for that because I have a lot of guards. You should take care of your—"

"I do have other tasks to take care of, but this is the most important task for me," Kim Hyun-Sung interrupted me.

'Why is this guy following me?'

He was making me feel uncomfortable.

From his expression, there was no way he was going to let me meet Gen without him.

He looked like a determined general facing an army of a million troops.

“I have the Blue Guild and the Holy Knights of the Vatican,” I told him.

“I can’t trust them. If you’re going to visit that criminal, I’ll accompany you,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“…”

“…”

“Do… as you wish,” I said.

‘You’re the one who’s going to be frustrated.’

I walked quietly, and the silence made me feel really uncomfortable. It felt like everyone was looking at me, and all I could hear were footsteps. Of course, the scenery was changing and I no longer saw the temple that was filled with light.

I walked down the wet and dark stairs until I saw the pitch-black underground interrogation room. It looked like there wasn’t any interrogation or torture going on right now, as I couldn’t hear any screams.

However, they were probably told ahead of time that I was coming.

“*Heuk… heuk…* O Benigoa… O Benigoa…”

“*Kgh… Heuuung…* O Benigoa. Please save me.”

Those were the noises I could hear.

“You bastards!”

I sometimes heard cursing as well.

“I… I really… don’t know anything. O Benigoa… I have never harmed him…”

I heard a voice full of regret, and I assumed that it belonged to Father Yohan.

‘He’s still alive?’

The deeper we went down, the more sealed doors appeared before me. They were all sealed using locks, spells, and holy power. Also…

"I'll head in alone from here," I told them.

"I'm sorry, but that's—"

"He will not harm me," I interrupted them.

'I can't trust them.'

"I'm here… to defend Templar Gen. It's my duty to meet and talk to him so I can defend him. It's his right. I know what all of you are worried about, but as someone who loves the Sacred Democratic Country, I don't want to give up my authority and duty," I explained.

"It's Father Basel's wish, Father Lee Ki-Young," a knight informed.

"I respect his wishes, but I cannot deny the holy law of the Democratic Country established by Goddess Benigoa's will. I understand how all of you are feeling, but I hope you all understand how *I* feel," I said.

'What's wrong with them? It's the holy law of the Democratic Country established under Goddess Benigoa's will.'

They looked like they weren't going to back down, and it was probably because of my kidnapping case. Perhaps it was because all of them had gotten a taste of Father Basel's mace, but they looked like they'd rather die than leave me alone.

'I have other plans today.'

"I'm sorry, Father Lee Ki-Young."

"*Whoo…* in that case…" I trailed off.

"…"

"I'll take four Holy Knights with me. If you don't agree with this, I won't back down either," I offered.

“Then I’ll go with you, Mr. Ki-Young,” Kim Hyun-Sung offered.

‘Why is he butting in?’

However, the Holy Knights looked relieved. They were probably thinking that leaving the Sunset Swordsman to protect me was more effective than four Holy Knights protecting me.

“Then we’ll leave it to you, Sunset Swordsman,” a knight said.

I didn’t agree to their arrangement, but they had already come to an agreement.

The Holy Knights stepped back while Kim Hyun-Sung moved closer to me. A few priests cast a holy spell, and the iron door, which was so secure that it seemed like the demon king himself was sealed inside, opened slowly before me.

I saw iron bars created by spells, and I saw Gen sitting quietly in the middle of the room.

“Mr. Gen,” I said quietly.

“Mr. Gen!” I shouted.

Gen opened his eyes slowly. He seemed fine physically.

He looked shabby, but he didn’t look hurt. However, I was sure his insides were in a mess. How could he not suffer any pain inside an interrogation room?

It was more convincing to say that his wounds were treated hastily when the personnel here heard that I was visiting him. As expected, I saw traces of his wounds receiving treatment from a holy spell.

I was sure he had a tough and difficult time here. This place was probably like hell to him right now. However, he wasn’t the only one who was having a tough and difficult time.

‘I’m having a really *tough and difficult time as well.’*

Being locked up in a birdcage was really tough. I was in hell as well.

There was a stark contrast between us. Gen was wearing prison clothes in this dark place, while I was like a doll covered in all sorts of fancy accessories. It was like we were the continent's darkness and light.

Gen's eyes widened upon seeing me.

He looked happy to see me, but he started frowning upon noticing my getup.

The more he looked at me, the more depressed he felt. After all, he knew that I was locked in a birdcage once again. This was the result of his mistake. I was forced to live the life I didn't want to live because he couldn't protect me.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young… Mr. Lee Ki-Young!" Gen shouted. He suddenly ran toward me, but he obviously couldn't reach me because the chains binding him pulled him back. Perhaps it was because his wrists and ankles were chained up, but I saw red liquid dripping down his wrists and ankles.

However, he didn't seem to care about his wounds.

"Are you okay, Mr. Lee Ki-Young?" Gen asked.

"…"

"Are you okay? Are you… really okay?" Gen repeated.

I had to force a smile.

"Yes, I-I'm fine," I answered.

"…"

"…"

"There's no way you're fine," he said.

'No, I'm actually doing great.'

"Just because… you smile like that doesn't mean you're okay," Gen added.

'No, man. My satisfaction in life has increased by a ton since our return.'

“Y-You look sad,” Gen stuttered.

‘That’s because I need to look sad.’

Recently, however, I had been thinking that life was always like this, and I wasn’t lying about that. It was actually comfortable to stay inside a birdcage, and I questioned why I left it in the first place. I also discovered that I preferred meat over pig porridge.

“Mr. Gen… are you okay?” I asked.

However, I couldn’t mess this up.

This was the scene where we’d reconfirm our bond. If this were a play, it would be sad enough to make people cry.

Our position had changed drastically, but we were still friends staring at the same goal.

Meanwhile, Kim Hyun-Sung was feeling anxious in this prison cell that was overflowing with emotions.

CHAPTER 943
TRIAL (2)

'Your friend isn't going anywhere.'

His expression was a sight to see.

'Kim Hyun-Sung was still a child. His mental age is that of a child.'

Of course, he was just worried about me, and he was still convinced that I was still experiencing mental issues. Stockholm syndrome or whatever had nothing to do with me, but Kim Hyun-Sung didn't believe it.

He was certain I had problems, so he was examining my behavior.

It was like he wanted to nitpick my smallest actions, but the most noticeable part about him was his fear of losing his close friend, Lee Ki-Young. He was still afraid of being left alone.

'You're not even a baby. What are you, twelve? Sixteen?'

We were brothers connected by a bond, and I was a friend he could give up his life for.

We both understood each other, and we had spent a long time together.

Our bond had become extremely deep and could no longer be compared to our relationship when we were still in the tutorial dungeon. Despite that, he was still afraid that I was going to leave him so easily.

At first, I thought it wasn't so bad, but I never imagined he'd still be obsessed over that possibility. In his eyes, I was like a childhood friend who was becoming even closer to my new friend. He felt left out upon realizing that both Gen and I had shared precious memories.

He was shaken by the ridiculous idea that I'd be as fickle as a child.

It seemed like my revival was just yesterday, and we had our own splendid ending upon confirming our bond. I thought he was no longer being plagued by his mental illness, but…

'I guess he still hasn't changed.'

Perhaps it was because he never had a friend except for me.

'He looks normal, but he's really pathetic. I'm sure he never had someone he could call a friend since he was in elementary school up until now.'

Kim Hyun-Sung had always been that kind of person.

He was a coward and reserved. He was also always worried about his relationship with others, so I was sure he was having a hard time watching this NTR live show starring the bastard who had already been branded as a criminal.

'I'll make time later and play with you.'

I was briefly worried about him, but I didn't really focus on Kim Hyun-Sung. What was important right now was Gen, not Kim Hyun-Sung's anxiety. I cast a soundproofing barrier, but…

'Why is he coming in here?'

I could feel Kim Hyun-Sung trying to make a hole in the barrier with his mana. I glared at him once, and he quickly looked away.

I could finally focus on the conversation.

"Are you hurt anywhere? Were you tortured… or did you experience anything horrible?" I asked.

"I didn't experience anything like that, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," Gen replied.

"Have you been eating well? The… others…" I paused.

"Yes."

"I'm glad to hear that, but…"

It was a white lie. I was sure his entire body was screaming at him in pain.

'Look at his chapped lips. I don't think he's been drinking water.'

"Can you tell me what questions the Heretic Inquisitors had asked you to answer?" I asked.

"A-Actually, I'd like to know how you've been doing these days," Gen said.

"That's not important, Mr. Gen. Right now—"

"I really want to know," Gen interrupted me.

'It's been the same for me. What do you want to know so badly about?'

"I've been… praying every day…" I said.

'I've been drinking wine while taking half-baths, and I've been enjoying my time as if I were unemployed. I've also been eating Mirror Salmon and cotton candy instead of pig porridge… '

"Every time…"

'I've been coping with the same method as I've been using all this while. My schedule is the same each time, but I don't feel like I'll get tired of it. This must be what it feels like to live a decent life.'

Gen frowned.

"W-Whenever I feel suffocated, I tend to look up at the sky," I told him.

'That's right, our promise.'

"I see…" he mumbled.

"There are times when it's hard and tiring… but I'll remember our promise and look up while thinking about memories together," I added.

Gen was relieved, and he was comforted by the fact that he was helpful to me, albeit in an indirect manner. However, he then lowered his head upon realizing that our

promise could no longer be fulfilled.

I was sure Gen knew about his situation better than anyone. He knew how dark and dangerous the Vatican was. There was no way I'd just stand by and do nothing.

For the past three days, Gen seemed to be thinking that the weak Saint of Light had done something.

'Actually, I didn't do anything.'

Gen probably assumed that I visited Father Basel to plead and convince Father Basel that he was innocent. He seemed to be thinking that I got on the floor and insisted that I was the one who wanted to be free and that he was innocent.

I assumed he was thinking that I had been thinking of ways to set him free while crying every day. Despite my efforts, however, nothing had really changed, as the Vatican was trying to hide the truth.

The fact that I ran out of the Vatican myself to find freedom would not only taint my honor but the Vatican's honor as well. It wasn't something that could be dismissed as a one-time mistake. The Vatican had decided to sacrifice someone rather than tainting their honor, and the sacrifice was Gen.

"I'm sorry I couldn't be with you," Gen said.

"You don't need to apologize for anything, Mr. Gen. All this happened because I was stupid and incompetent," I told him.

"I'm sorry I couldn't keep my promise. I'm really sorry… for leaving you alone," Gen said.

"What do you mean alone? I'm not alone, and I never thought that I was alone. We're seeing different things, and we're in different positions, but I know we're always looking at the same goal. I'm sure you're looking at the same goal as well, Mr. Gen…"

I cried, and I was worried that perhaps I looked too desperate. I thought I was overreacting, but this was good enough because I had no intention of wasting time filming a melodrama.

"I'm preparing for the trial, Mr. Gen," I informed him.

"…"

"I told you before, but it's my turn this time. This time, I'll take you out from here," I said.

"That's—"

"I already decided," I interrupted him.

"It's impossible. No, I'm worried it'll harm you, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," Gen said.

'You know I'll never yield to the pressure of great power. I've always stood my ground.'

"They're trying to purge the opposite faction, including the Templars," I informed him.

Some Templars had already been purged. I couldn't find Templar Simon's whereabouts, but Father Yohan would soon die, and I was sure that his subordinates would meet the same horrible fate as him.

"I don't know which side is correct, but their ways are wrong. T-They're claiming that the Templars are corrupted beings who had stolen Goddess Benigoa's power. They're saying that you and Templar Simon had extorted Goddess Benigoa out of Her power.

"They're stating that the opposite faction is filled with nothing but a bunch of heretics and that they must be purged," I explained.

"…"

"They're claiming that you kidnapped me… to do something horrible to me," I added.

"That's not true!" Gen shouted.

'Oh yeah? But you guys do look like heretics in my eyes.'

"I must reveal the truth," I said.

"…"

"You must tell me everything you know," I said.

“I can… tell you everything,” Gen mumbled.

‘Of course, you should tell me everything. We can start with either how you got your wings, the dungeon’s location, or Templar Simon’s location.’

‘But why does it feel like he’s being hesitant?’

I almost cursed, but…

‘He’s just worried about me.’

He was worried about me getting swept up in a dirty court battle.

“I’m a strong person, Mr. Gen,” I told him.

“…”

“…” “Yes, I’m aware. You’re a strong person, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. You’re strong and confident; you’ve never been the type to back down nor surrender… You were brave enough to face everything,” Gen said.

‘Yeah, that’s the kind of image I want to show everyone.’

“I’ll tell you everything,” Gen said.

I nodded quietly…

Just as Gen was about to start speaking, the soundproofing barrier I made shattered. I looked to the side, thinking that Kim Hyun-Sung had done something unexpected, but he hadn’t done anything. In fact, he actually looked away upon seeing my gaze.

‘It’s not Hyun-Sung.’

“Visiting hours are over, Father Lee Ki-Young.” A familiar voice echoed, and it was a *very* sassy voice. “It’s interrogation time now.”

‘Why are you here, damn it?’

I looked back and saw Jin Cheong—the rude guy who called me a bastard. It had been a while since I heard him talk to me with respect and using my title.

It was probably because there were other people around, but more importantly, his attitude bothered me. I was annoyed by the fact that he appeared with many adjutants, and they were actually holding piles of documents.

'I thought you didn't want to get involved, damn it. So why did you accept it?'

'Did you actually become a special prosecutor? But why?'

"You have exceeded the visiting time that's written under continental law, Father Lee Ki-Young," Jin Cheong added.

"…"

"Since you asserted the suspect's rights as specified in the continental law, I believe you're also aware of the visiting time that's specified in the same law," Jin Cheong said.

'This bastard is being really sassy right now.'

"To make things worse, it looks like you ignored most of the procedures." Jin Cheong pointed out.

'I did, damn it. I didn't submit a request to meet with the suspect or ask for protection. I'm the Honorary Cardinal of the Sacred Democratic Country, you bastard. Do you really think those procedures will stop me? I'm the Sacred Democratic Country, and the Sacred Democratic Country is me.'

"Please be careful next time. You can't ignore all the complicated procedures as you please and focus only on the continental law. I'll consider this a mistake made out of ignorance since you must not be familiar with the procedures yet," Jin Cheong continued.

'This bastard is acting really sassy.'

I was startled, but I had an idea why he was here.

'Are you that *bored? You really want to fight me?'*

I had been wanting to have a proper match with him, but I never really had the opportunity for that until now. And I was sure he shared the same sentiment as me;

otherwise, he wouldn't have accepted Kim Hyun-Sung's proposal.

It seemed that he really wanted to put me in a difficult position.

Of course, he could also be doing this only to relieve some of the stress inside of him.

I was sure Jin Cheong had been full of stress these days. This probably felt like a game to him. It was different from the game he enjoyed, but he probably wanted to play a game on top of the chessboard with someone similar to him.

The black market had disappeared, and he was done babysitting Kim Hyun-Sung, so he wanted to enjoy his free time. He definitely thought of his desire not to get involved with us again, but he simply couldn't resist the temptation of playing a game against me.

Jin Cheong smiled as if to prove that my assumption was correct.

As always, his smile was both arrogant and annoying.

He looked like he was telling me that he was above me.

— Let's start the game.

'He's crazy. You've already lost to me once. Are you really that excited to lose again?"

"Do you… want to lose your honor?"

'You want to fall into the abyss again?'

CHAPTER 944
TRIAL (3)

"We need to beat that bastard to a pulp until he can no longer stand up again," I said.

"Don't go overboard, okay? Commander Jin is in charge of a lot more things than I thought. If we get rid of him without considering those things, things are only going to become harder for us. Don't bring your personal feelings into business. It's all because of Commander Jin that we have been able to work like this," Lee Ji-Hye reminded.

"…"

"If we drive Commander Jin out, the dragon mother will become wary, too," she added.

'She's right. I'll feel kind of bad for Dialugia as well.'

"He's so arrogant. Who does he think he is that he thinks he can become the special prosecutor? What does a guy from the Republic know about the Democratic Country?

"He knows nothing, but he talks like he does. Does he want to be exiled to the Democratic Country or something? Is he *that* familiar with democratic law?" I questioned.

"I think he's doing all that to provoke you," Lee Ji-Hye commented.

"We need to bring him down so hard that he won't be able to step onto a stage again, much less attend any trial in the future. You looked up the laws and any precedents about special prosecutors, right?" I asked.

"Everything you requested is on your desk right now, but things are going to become harder for you if he insists on becoming a special prosecutor," Lee Ji-Hye said.

'That's true, but that bastard really annoys me. Just thinking about him raising an

objection in court is already making me feel frustrated.'

"Just leaving him alone is the best option, and it's the best choice for you as well," Lee Ji-Hye suggested.

The best thing to do here was to drag him down from his position as a special prosecutor by questioning his qualifications, as he was a Republican, after all. He wasn't a denizen of the Sacred Democratic Country, so I could definitely use that fact to my advantage.

The problem was the aftermath. I'd definitely be happy to bring him down, but I could already see what Jin Cheong was going to do next.

'He's going to take it to the continental court.'

To be honest, Kim Hyun-Sung was the one who had destroyed the city of the Republic, but Templar Gen had also contributed to the city's destruction. The upcoming trial was actually misleading.

The Republic was the one that suffered immense damage, the crime took place in the Republic, and the criminal was captured in the Republic. In other words, there was no reason for the Republic to hand over the criminal to the Sacred Democratic Country.

The reason they did that was to be considerate to the Sacred Democratic Country, as both nations were allies, after all. The trial that was supposed to take place only within the Sacred Democratic Country would become a trial that everyone throughout the continent would witness if I brought Jin Cheong down through nitpicking.

To make matters worse, it was legal.

'I have to stay calm, but I just can't… '

The pieces of evidence were with the Republic.

The investigation team consisted of the Vatican's Heretic Inquisitors and the elite rangers of the Sacred Democratic Country, but the moment the case was taken to the continental court… the desolate building that contained our precious memories would be trampled mercilessly by those scums from the Republic.

‘I don’t think they’ll fabricate the evidence, but you never know. Words can have many different meanings depending on how they are interpreted.’

“It’s definitely advantageous to end it within the Democratic Country,” I said.

“You’re right. It’s better to just leave Jin Cheong alone. It’s taking place within the Sacred Democratic Country anyway, so his powers are limited here. There are a limited number of adjutants he can dispatch. I don’t think it matters even if he receives support from the Sacred Democratic Country, but the fact that he can’t work with his people is kind of—”

“You’re not going to do it? You’ll help me, right?” I interrupted.

“I’m helping you right now,” Lee Ji-Hye said.

“…”

“…”

“You’re not doing it right?” I asked her.

“What am I supposed to do? I have my own work to do, too. Honestly, this is just a fight between prideful kids. Don’t you think the trial is none of your business? Just tell Templar Gen or Templar Gwen to tell you everything that he knows and then kill him,” Lee Ji-Hye said.

‘That’s true. It doesn’t matter even if he just dies, but I feel like he can still be useful. It’s not like I had put in a lot of effort into him, anyway.’

‘Regardless, I just don’t want to see a smile tugging at that arrogant guy’s lips. But Ji-Hye noona is technically not on my side as well.’

She didn’t want to get involved, so she had a neutral stance about this, but her words basically meant that she wasn’t on my side. The way she was carelessly flipping through the documents was unlike her.

I wasn’t going to force her, but I didn’t really think that she’d be helpful.

‘I lack manpower.’

To make matters worse, I found out too late that Jin Cheong had decided to intervene…

“Sub Guild Master?”

“Miss Kim Mi-Young, I’m glad you’re here,” I greeted.

I had yet to form a proper defense counsel. I thought the trial was going to be easy, so I decided to take my time and have fun. I was also in the middle of recovering, so I couldn’t have seen that the cowardly Jin Cheong of the Republic would intervene.

“I have organized all the documents that you requested. This incident is pretty unique, so I couldn’t really find an exact precedent, but there have been cases where the victim had decided to defend the suspect.

“A hundred and eleven years ago, a saintess was kidnapped, but she didn’t want her kidnapper, Holy Knight Barhak, to receive punishment…”

‘But he was torn to pieces despite that… ‘

Holy Knight Barhak was drawn and quartered. His sin was lusting after the Saintess of the Vatican. It was a cruel and unusual punishment, but perhaps they thought it was the right thing to do at the time.

“There’s another case from fifty-four years ago. It’s about Princess Charlperia of the Benigoa Holy Empire. She was kidnapped by the Prime Minister of the Union of Kingdoms, and…” Kim Mi-Young trailed off.

He was killed as well.

“Those cases…”

“Yes, they happened a long time ago when the Benigoa Holy Empire still exists. If we argue that those cases aren’t exactly the best examples, they won’t be able to find fault with it,” Kim Mi-Young interrupted me.

“Are there no cases where the defendant ended up winning the trial?” I asked.

“Yes, there were no cases like that,” Kim Mi-Young replied.

These past cases didn't really matter, as the law had changed a lot since then. One thing I was happy about was that the one presiding over the trial wasn't the Vatican. The Heretic Inquisitors would be the ones presiding over the trial. If a religious trial were to take place, Templar Gen would surely become another Ito Sota.

It was possible that the Vatican would go a bit easy, but it was highly unlikely. They just didn't want me to resent them, and it applied to both the Vatican and the Sacred Democratic Country.

"Since the Sacred Democratic Country and the Vatican will operate the trial together, there is going to be a jury," Kim Mi-Young informed.

They didn't want any of the sides to resent them.

Kim Hyun-Sung wasn't the only one who welcomed Jin Cheong.

It was the same for Father Basel and Oscar.

"The jury will consist of ten religious officials from the Vatican and eleven denizens from the Sacred Democratic Country, and they'll be selected at random," Kim Mi-Young added.

"Who would do the sentencing? The Supreme Court's judge?" I asked.

"A cardinal will do it, too," Kim Mi-Young answered.

'Looks like they don't want to take responsibility.'

They probably thought that my obsession with Templar Gen was abnormal. In the end, they'd let the jury decide whether he was innocent or not, and then the Supreme Court's judge and a cardinal of the Vatican would determine the punishment.

'Having a jury is more advantageous to me.'

The ones who would decide whether Gen was innocent or not would be ordinary people rather than well-educated people. However, the judgements of ordinary denizens who weren't particularly educated had always been a source of controversy, even in countries with jury trials.

'A jury is great because they can be swayed.'

One could win their favor and make them sympathize with oneself. One could say anything, and they'd believe it. Of course, the Supreme Court or the opposite party could set some restrictions, but an emotional appeal that would bring tears to anyone's eyes would definitely be a hundred percent effective.

Jin Cheong wasn't really used to that. He probably thought that he just had to say whatever he had to say, and that was it. If the jury could be convinced through evidence alone, then they could just sentence the criminal themselves.

However, humans were emotional creatures.

"Do you…" I paused and stared at Miss Kim Mi-Young. "Do you have the jury list?"

'I'm sure it's private.'

"I have it," Kim Mi-Young said.

As always, she was really competent.

If there was going to be a jury trial, then focusing on them was the best option.

Jin Cheong's presence in a normal trial conducted using the Democratic Country's methods made me feel nervous. Moreover, a religious trial conducted in our style had too many variables, and it was impossible to be prepared for each and every one of them. The jury system, which was decided because both parties would end up going back and forth a lot, was the best for me.

"The first juror is George…" I said.

"He's known as the Third-Rate Gambler," Kim Mi-Young said.

'So I just need to pay him a little gold.'

"Kennen," I said.

"He's known as the Playboy of Lindel. The two of them have participated in the major wars… Actually, they participated in all the wars you were in so far," Kim Mi-Young corrected herself.

“Really? The two of them?” I asked.

“They’re in the same party,” Kim Mi-Young said.

I would probably get punished for this, but it wasn’t bad. The fact that they were participants in all the major wars meant that they had worked together in a place that was close to me, the Honorary Cardinal of the Vatican and the Saint of Light.

“Elf Eledian. That’s bad,” I commented.

“That’s right.”

The majority of the elves were a stickler for principles. It was highly likely that they’d side with reason rather than emotion. If Commander Jin brought proper evidence… they’d say Templar Gen was guilty before crying together with the Saint of Light.

“Giselle Garix of Castlerock. She’s an immigrant from the Republic and is currently a citizen of the Sacred Democratic Country,” Kim Mi-Young informed.

‘Someone from the Republic is part of the jury?’

Were they really picked randomly?

I skimmed through the list, and I could tell that they were picked in a way that would give me a bit of an advantage. There would always be variables, but it wasn’t anything I couldn’t handle. I wasn’t the one who needed to be worried about the jury.

“It’s Jin Cheong,” I mumbled.

“What?”

“No, it’s nothing, Miss Kim Mi-Young. What about the Supreme Court judge and the cardinal?” I asked.

“They haven’t decided on the judge yet, but the cardinal who will participate in the trial is Sister Jayna,” Kim Mi-Young responded.

“Sister Jayna?” I asked.

“She recently became a cardinal to replace Father Yohan,” Kim Mi-Young informed.

“I see. Thank you, Miss Kim Mi-Young,” I said.

Kim Mi-Young nodded lightly and said, “Since we don’t have a defense counsel yet…”

“Go ahead,” I told her.

I was sure she’d make one with competent people.

“You heard everything, right? You really don’t want to join the defense counsel?” I asked.

“I don’t. I’m really busy. Since Commander Jin is busy with the trial, I should at least take care of the tasks. Also, I’ve told you this many times now, but stop being so stubborn. All you need to do is get the information and let him die…” Lee Ji-Hye said.

‘My pride won’t let me, Ji-Hye noona.’

“Then set up a meeting with Sister Jayna,” I requested.

“You’re talking nonsense again. That’s against the law,” Kim Mi-Young said.

“If you do that, I won’t ask you to join the defense counsel. I’m… in a lot of pain right now,” I told her.

Asking to meet with the cardinal who was preparing for the upcoming trial was illogical, and it wasn’t supposed to be done, but I was sure Ji-Hye noona could do it.

I was sure she felt guilty about the fact that she wasn’t going to help me, so she’d probably help me with this.

“Don’t you think you’re being really unfair right now?” Lee Ji-Hye asked.

The unfair and wicked ones usually were the winners.

If Jin Cheong ended up beating me in the upcoming trial, I wouldn’t be able to have a good night’s sleep for quite a long while.

‘Does she not know the feeling of getting defeated in one’s home ground? If Jin Cheong somehow managed to defeat me, then I’m sure he’ll smile meaningfully every time he sees me. I can’t bear to see that. I need to help him realize that he got a bit too reckless

by stepping into this fight.

'I'm the Sacred Democratic Country, and the Sacred Democratic Country is me. The Sacred Democratic Country is one, so I'm not being unfair here.

'The loser will become the *idiot, so… '*

"…"

"…"

"Then… please continue with your testimony, the prosecutor's witness. Is it true that you stayed in the same inn as Father Lee Ki-Young?" the judge asked.

"T-That's right. E-Every night, I could hear Father Lee Ki-Young's screams and painful groans. I could hear *thud, thud, thud* coming from their room. I tried not to listen… but I just couldn't ignore his painful screams…" the witness muttered fearfully.

"O Benigoa…!"

"O Benigoa…!"

"*Sob…! sob…* Son of Light…"

I turned to Jin Cheong, and he flashed me a disgusting smile.

'That bastard… '

"…"

This coward had just brought in a fake witness to the sacred court. He wanted to convince everyone to believe his words through his lies, so I felt dumb for trying to go about this trial in a fair and honest way.

CHAPTER 945
TRIAL (4)

We were in the court of the Sacred Democratic Country, and this court, which was built on the blood of countless people, had to be the purest and sacred place throughout the Sacred Democratic Country, yet Jin Cheong was here spreading lies using his witness.

I got angry at the fact that the idea of fairness had just been thrown out of the window. How can I not be angry when the uncivilized beast of the Republic was using the sacred court to put his enemy in a difficult situation?

'That cowardly and wicked bastard… '

I glanced at him. Was he unable to feel even an ounce of shame? Jin Cheong's expression remained unchanging, and he was nodding at the witness' every single word. The sound of prayer filled the court at some point.

"O Benigoa…!"

"Son of Light…!"

The guy who was summoned as a witness was someone I had never seen before, but it was possible that I had encountered him before, and I simply couldn't remember him. I could have run into him at the inn inside the Republic.

I wasn't sure where we stumbled upon each other, but I had definitely run into him at least once.

'There's no way he'd work in vain.'

I had no idea how long he had stayed at that inn, but he was definitely there…

'And inns usually have logs containing the names of their guests… '

His alibi definitely matched perfectly with his sworn statement.

“He sounded like he was in extreme pain; he sounded like he was trying to hold back his screams, but he just couldn’t do so because he was in so much pain.

“I heard someone scream as if they were venting their anger, and then I heard another scream immediately afterward. He must’ve been gagged at the time, as I could hear a muffled sound before everything went quiet.

“Just as I thought it was over, I heard someone hitting something, but I didn’t hear any screams. I-I think that was when he fainted…” the witness explained.

“Objection, Your Honor. The witness is saying what he believes to be true rather than actual facts. He’s trying to sway the jury using speculative remarks,” a member of our side argued.

“Objection overruled. Let’s keep listening. Witness, did it happen only on that one day?” the judge asked.

“I don’t really remember, but it wasn’t just that one particular day. I could hear it day and night from that day on,” the witness replied.

“Why did you not contact the local authorities?” the judge asked.

“B-because I was scared. I’m just an ordinary merchant. I was scared of revenge and getting caught up in a scary situation.

“S-So I comforted myself by saying it wasn’t a big deal. I really never imagined that something like that was going on, but I have no excuses,” the witness replied.

‘They sure are prepared.’

“Have you ever seen those two come out of their room?” the judge asked.

“I remember them spending most of their time in their room. They’d sometimes come out to the dining room to eat… but I couldn’t quite see his face because he was always covered in what looked like a blanket—” the witness answered.

“Your Honor, there isn’t enough evidence to support the witness’ testimony. Being in the same inn is not enough evidence,” Miss Kim Mi-Young interrupted.

“I swear to the Goddess that I am not giving a false testimony. The man covered in

what looked like a blanket was limping; he was having a hard time walking with his legs!

“Back then, I couldn’t tell whether that man was Father Lee Ki-Young or not, but I’m sure of it now. He’d often drop his spoon while eating as if one side of his body was in pain, and he couldn’t eat properly,” the witness argued.

“Objection, Your Honor!” our party shouted.

Our defense counsel raised objections, but the judge didn’t even look their way.

‘We’re going to submit evidence as well.’

The annoying Jin Cheong got up and said, “I will now present the list of guests who stayed at the inn at the time and a video footage of the dining hall as evidence.”

The video contained in the video orb was promptly displayed on a big Goddess’ Mirror.

‘Damn. I really went all in with my acting here.’

Obviously, we saw the dining hall of the inn.

A limping man entered the dining hall. He was covered in a dirty blanket and was eating his food cautiously, but it seemed that he lacked the energy to even hold up a spoon, as it kept falling to the table. His hands were trembling as he forced himself to eat a few bites before dragging himself back upstairs. He looked really pitiful.

“Honorable judge, Cardinal, and jurors, I believe you’ll make the right choice here. The evidence is rock solid. Upon entering the Republic, Father Lee Ki-Young was faced with extreme brutality, and we don’t even dare to imagine… the suffering he had gone through before he arrived in the Republic,” Jin Cheong said.

‘Father Lee Ki-Young, my ass! He’s such a… dirty bastard.’

“This is what Father Lee Ki-Young looked like when we discovered him,” Jin Cheong added.

A picture of me appeared on the Goddess’ Mirror, but I had no idea when that picture was even taken. I looked like a mess, and I looked like I definitely received a good

beating or two. My wounds were treated using holy power, but traces of the ruthless torture were still visible to me. My neck was swollen, and my eyes were bruised.

I was so dehydrated that my lips were chapped, and blood was dripping down from it.

"*Ah…"* I heard someone gasp from the crowd. Belier, a new guild member, was staring at the Goddess' Mirror with a flushed face.

'What's wrong with her?'

My weak smile brought tears to everyone's eyes. The smile that seemed capable of forgiving everything—even the criminal who had subjected me to extreme torture—made everyone feel like crying on the spot.

"Let go of me! That bastard! That bastard!" someone shouted.

'Ah, shit.'

I heard a commotion among the crowd.

'Why did he come here?'

The furious Park Deok-Gu stood up.

The Holy Knights and the security guards tried to stop him from shouting, but it was useless.

"That bastard! You're telling me that's how he treated our hyung-nim?! You shameless bastard!" Park Deok-Gu shouted.

The pig was even crying.

"Let go of me! I don't care about this court or trial or whatever! I have to beat him to a pulp, or I'm never going to feel better!" Park Deok-Gu yelled.

"…"

The Holy Knights and the security guards had no choice but to drag him out, but he didn't stop cursing as he was being dragged out of the court.

“You’re a monster! How dare you hurt him! Our hyung-nim did nothing wrong! H-How could you hurt him?! Oh no… hyung-nim…! Oh no… I feel really bad for you, hyung-nim…” Park Deok-Gu cried out.

‘Just leave, man.’

“That bastard is guilty, Your Honor! Cardinal! And jurors! I’m ignorant, so I don’t know much about the law, but that fool is guilty! He’s guilty!” Park Deok-Gu shouted.

‘Please leave.’

“*Sob!* Our hyung-nim had once decided to abandon everything for the continent, which resulted in his demise. It hasn’t even been that long since he was revived, and he has already suffered such a—*sob!*

*“*How could you do that to him?! How could you do such a thing to such a selfless and self-sacrificing man?!” Park Deok-Gu exclaimed.

‘Please just leave… ‘

The pig was just rambling on, but it was pretty effective. The crowd empathized with him as he spat out a bunch of nonsense while crying his heart out. In addition to those quietly sobbing, I saw a few people crying their hearts out as well.

‘Get out already, man.’

“I’ll say one more thing. Jurors, my fist… this fist of mine won’t reach him, but your fists will reach. I’m… just his stupid younger brother, and I can’t avenge him, but all of you can avenge him!

“The job to avenge him is in your hands; you have to do it for the continent and for hyung-nim! You must punish that fool… so that this will never happen again. We must create a continent where hyung-nim will be safe!” Park Deok-Gu shouted.

‘Just get out. Why are you still here?’

He didn’t lower his voice despite getting dragged out. The unexpected favorable situation caused Jin Cheong to smile and it was to the point that I started questioning if maybe that pig was on his side.

“Please remember my words! Jurors! Our hyung-nim!!!”

Boom!

The doors closed and although it didn’t last long, it was impactful.

‘Damn it.’

“I request for a recess.”

The atmosphere was so one-sided that there was no way a proper trial could be done.

Miss Kim Mi-Young quietly raised her hand, requesting for a recess but even that was hard here.

“The witness’s testimony isn’t over yet, Your Honor,” Jin Cheong argued.

“Please continue, then,” the judge said.

“I’ll also submit these pictures as evidence,” Jin Cheong said.

“Objection, Your Honor. Those pictures cannot be used as proof that Templar Gen was violent to Father Lee Ki-Young,” Kim Mi-Young chimed in.

“Then, who did it?!” Jin Cheong shouted.

“…”

“Who?! Who inflicted those wounds on Father Lee Ki-Young?!” Jin Cheong questioned.

Everything felt fabricated.

To make matters worse, the bastards who gave me a beating were no longer a part of this world.

“Who committed such malicious and thoughtless brutality on Father Lee Ki-Young?! Tell me! Who? Who did it?!” Jin Cheong asked.

They had completely disappeared, and I was sure the videos with their figures on Benigoa Net had all been taken down.

Of course, I didn't really think that they'd be useful in this private prosecution.

The defense counsel hesitated.

Jin Cheong seemed to be enjoying this, as he was really energetic.

He slammed the table and opened his arms wide with exaggeration. It was like he was relieving his regret of not being able to participate in Father Lee Ki-Young's rescue operation. He spoke with confidence as if he was the protagonist of this stage.

"I know the answer, Your Honor," Jin Cheong said.

"Go on."

"We found some blood in one of the places where Father Lee Ki-Young and that vicious criminal stayed for a while. I'll also submit them as evidence," Jin Cheong said.

"…"

"We also discovered traces of Father Lee Ki-Young getting beaten up in a desolate building inside the Demonic Forest of Laios. We believe they stayed there for a while before entering the Republic," Jin Cheong added.

It really was too easy to transform someone into a criminal.

I was bleeding at the time due to all the sewing that I was doing.

"Objection, Your Honor!" Kim Mi-Young shouted.

"Objection overruled. You'll have your turn once the prosecution is done presenting their evidence," the judge said.

"…"

"The exhausted and weakened Father Lee Ki-Young was constantly being assaulted even in Laios, and it was the same in the Republic. With that in mind, I'm sure it was

the same even while they were moving around hiding from our rangers.

“There’s an overwhelming amount of evidence that supports this claim. The rangers of the investigation team also discovered traces of holy power being used constantly from the Demonic Forest to the Republic, but there were no traces of battle,” Jin Cheong said.

“…”

“There were no traces of battle, but we found traces of a healing spell being cast by holy power. I’m sure it’s the accused. He definitely used Father Lee Ki-Young’s holy power to heal the latter, who was probably dying at the time.

“I’m sure Father Lee Ki-Young was dying because his weak physique couldn’t endure the ruthless beating and violence being inflicted on him. The accused must’ve been taking out his anger on Lee Ki-Young.

“Of course, it could have been just a joke, or he could have done it for literally nothing at all. We are unsure of his motives, but he was *killing* the Son of Light,” Jin Cheong added.

“…”

“What are you so afraid of, Father Lee Ki-Young? What are you so afraid of that you’re sitting there? You shouldn’t be there,” Jin Cheong questioned.

‘Annoying bastard.’

“He can no longer harm you, and you no longer have to empathize with his pain. He’s a criminal,” Jin Cheong said.

“He’s the accused, not a criminal,” Kim Mi-Young corrected.

“There’s a story behind every criminal out there. I know you’re trying to side with him and understand him. Everyone knows you love humans, after all. *Hahaha!*” Jin Cheong chuckled.

‘Why are you laughing? Is it that fun?’

Jin Cheong seemed to have realized that he had made a mistake because his

expression immediately turned solemn.

“However, you don’t need to show love to such a vicious monster, Father Lee Ki-Young. You’re a victim, so you don’t need to defend him. Don’t make excuses for him. You must live for yourself,” Jin Cheong said.

“Objection, Your Honor. He’s talking about things unrelated to the trial,” Kim Mi-Young argued.

“That’s it. I’ll also submit the rangers’ notes as evidence. Honorable Judge and Cardinal, I’m done,” Jin Cheong said.

And that was the end of it.

I felt like he had punched me a few times, and his storytelling was so perfect that I couldn’t find any holes in it.

He took advantage of the temporary guild members, who were no longer part of this world. The documents and evidence that he had gathered while I was acting my heart out at the time were perfect.

They were fabricated, but the fabrication was so perfect that they were basically the truth.

‘Damn it.’

There was no way we could turn this around today. Park Deok-Gu had made such a big commotion out of this case that it was no longer possible to turn this around. Still, I had to stand up. It was going to sound like nonsense, but I had to say something here.

“Templar Gen… He’s a victim as well,” I said.

Of course, it was just a bunch of nonsense.

CHAPTER 946
TRIAL (5)

“Templar Gen is a victim created by the Sacred Democratic Country and the Vatican.”

“…”

“That was what Father Lee Ki-Young said, and I completely understand why he said that. According to Father Lee Ki-Young, Gen was actually a tool his entire life. He grew up in an orphanage managed by a temple, and he became a Templar for some reason.

“He spent the majority of his childhood and his teenage years training rigorously every day. He had never been able to do anything by his own will, so I won’t say that he had an easy life.

“The Templars turned Gen into a monster, and we can say that the Vatican is an accomplice, as the Vatican has never done anything about it,” Kennen explained.

“His upbringing is not an excuse for his crimes, Kennen,” I[1] said.

“You think I don’t know that? I’m just saying that I understand his position. I’m sure you can only say that because you didn’t see Father Lee Ki-Young pleading with tears in his eyes, Alex. I’m sure I wasn’t the only one who was swayed.

“I honestly think that the masterminds here are Templar Simon and Father Yohan,” Kennen added.

“Templar Simon? Father Yohan?” I asked.

“That’s right. Those jerks are the ones who used Templar Gen. Father Lee Ki-Young wasn’t lying when he said that Templar Gen was also a victim,” Kennen answered.

“Do you have proof that Templar Simon and Yohan had been using Templar Gen for their vested interests?

“And have you forgotten the note that Father Lee Ki-Young had left before he got kidnapped? Didn’t he write that something bad might happen to him? The Hero of Shadows submitted that note just now.

“The evidence is rock solid, Kennen. I don’t even think that we should hesitate here. It doesn’t matter what kind of conspiracy the Templars were involved in; the story behind his actions isn’t important as well.

“Of course, as a field investigator, I can’t tell a juror what they should do, but I believe that you’ll make a reasonable decision,” I said.

The gist of the story was that Father Lee Ki-Young, who was struggling to uncover the Templars’ conspiracy, had ended up getting kidnapped.

I turned and saw Father Lee Ki-Young’s messy room, which had never been touched since his disappearance.

There was a mess on the table, and there were torn pieces of paper and trash all over the floor. Most of the jurors gulped upon seeing the horrible sight. It was like they could clearly imagine what had transpired.

Perhaps the silence lasted too long because a junior of the Continental Management Committee shattered the silence, saying, “Father Lee Ki-Young was last seen here before he was kidnapped. Jurors, please make your decision while thinking of this sight.”

“What do the investigators think?” a juror asked.

“The field investigators believe that Father Lee Ki-Young didn’t show much resistance. They think that there was an argument followed by a brief struggle. As you can see, they exited the room through the window…” I replied.

“Where were the Holy Knights and the security guards of the temple?” a juror asked.

“We learned that the Holy Knights on Father Yohan’s side were on duty,” I answered.

“Is it safe to assume that this kidnapping was planned in advance?” they asked.

“That’s something you must decide. We’re only here to guide you into making the right decision,” an investigator said.

They were right, and my actions right now weren't befitting of a field investigator.

Kennen turned to me and said, "Your words and your junior's words are contradictory."

"…"

"Still, this is really incredible. Who could have known that you'd end up working at the Continental Protection Management Committee, Alex?" Kennen said.

"He's the reason I ended up changing my mind, Kennen. I had been living a sad life at the time, so I ended up joining the Committee to become someone useful to Father Lee Ki-Young.

"Now that something so absurd has occurred, how can I just stand by and do nothing? I honestly believe that a trial for him is a waste of time. We ought to have ripped him to pieces long ago," I told him.

"Lower your voice, Alex. You're really agitated right now. You know you shouldn't say that in front of the jurors, right?" Kennen reminded me.

"I'm saying this because you guys are here. I know how to keep my mouth shut somewhere else, so don't worry about me," I reassured him.

"…"

"You'd better be prepared for the next site," I warned.

"…"

"Miss Jung Suah?"

"Yes, sir?" Jung Suah replied.

"I think it's best if we head to the next site," I suggested.

"Okay. S-So do we just need to head *there*?" she asked.

"Yes. Guide the jurors to the warp gate and announce that we're heading straight to the Demonic Forest. We'll leave in ten minutes," I instructed.

“Yes, sir.”

“You actually look the part, Alex,” Kennen remarked.

“Shut up, Kennen,” I said.

“What’s your relationship with Jung Suah?” Kennen asked.

“There’s nothing going on between us,” I replied.

“But the way you guys were exchanging glances told me that there’s definitely *something* going on. Is it okay for you to date a colleague?” Kennen pointed out.

“Shut up, Kennen. I’m not in the mood for your jokes,” I told him.

I wasn’t sure what he was thinking. I thought this way of avoiding the elephant in the room, but I didn’t really approve of it. I was getting annoyed because Kennen was being a chatterbox next to me, but he soon became quiet.

And it was all because a shocking sight had appeared before him…

“The second site is the site where we believe Father Lee Ki-Young stayed for approximately eighteen days. The space inside is small, so we’ll allow only two people to enter at a time,” I informed.

The jurors were at a loss for words.

It was a desolate building that looked like a hut, as it was buried halfway into the ground. The ground was covered in muddy water and filth. It was questionable whether there was even proper air circulation inside the “hut.”

It was so smelly inside that I couldn’t breathe and couldn’t stop myself from frowning. It was a space so small and dirty that it was hard to believe that someone could even stay here for a minute, much less for eighteen days.

We were having a hard time staying in this place, so I could only imagine the suffering that Father Lee Ki-Young had to go through. I had been here once, but I was still at a loss for words upon seeing it twice.

‘The Son of Light… actually spent such a long time in a place like this?’

Kennen was silent while the religious jurors were already crying.

"*Sob! Sob…* O Benigoa!"

"Father Lee Ki-Young…!"

They were crying while calling out to the Goddess. Their crying seemed contagious because the others soon started crying as well. The desolate building looked like it was going to collapse at any moment, and the idea that he had struggled in a place like this for such a long time made the jurors' emotions run wild.

"The rangers believe that Father Lee Ki-Young went outside only two times throughout the ordeal," I told them.

"Does that mean he spent the rest of the roughly eighteen days in here except for the two times he went out?" a juror asked.

"That's right. His nutrition and health deteriorated drastically during his stay here. We believe that his current malady was caused by the time he had spent here. It was raining most of the time, so a majority of the traces have disappeared long ago, but Father Lee Ki-Young… he was assaulted many times in here," I replied.

"So the evidence that the Commander of the Republic had found was discovered here…" a juror muttered.

"That's right."

"We can't say this with certainty, but we believe that he had experienced a variety of harsh torture in here. In addition to the physical pain, I'm sure he was being mentally tortured as well.

"What's interesting is that he visited a nearby rural hamlet to exchange some of the leather he had obtained for everyday supplies," I explained.

The jurors started whispering among themselves.

"Why did he not let the villagers of that hamlet know about his plight?" a juror asked.

"He was probably worried that Templar Gen might take his anger out on them. I'm sure he would have done more than just kill them," I answered.

“We managed to confirm that he left the hamlet as quickly as possible, and then we discovered traces of holy power being used right after that,” Jung Suah chimed in.

“In other words, we think Father Lee Ki-Young ended up getting punished for visiting that rural hamlet,” I added.

“I agree,” Jung Suah said.

“How many times did he use healing-type holy spells…” a juror asked.

“We don’t know exactly how many times, but we believe that he frequently had to exhaust his holy power,” I answered.

“If someone with that much holy power had to frequently exhaust it to heal himself, then… he had to have been in a serious situation back then,” a juror said.

“Yes.”

“And he did say he almost died…”

“Why did he even buy everyday supplies?” a juror asked.

“Father Lee Ki-Young bought everyday supplies for Templar Gen. To serve food and make things convenient for him.”

“But why…” they questioned.

“We will understand his intentions unless he makes it clear to us himself, but if I were to make a guess… I’d say it’s because he found him pitiful.

“I’m sure they talked about many things. They spent over two weeks in this tiny place, so I believe that amount of time was enough for Father Lee Ki-Young to understand and empathize with him.

“The criminal had harmed, insulted, and humiliated the Son of Light, but he still ended up loving him, as he has always been that kind of person,” I explained.

“…”

“…”

“O Son of Light…!”

“*Whoo…*”

“That’s probably the reason why the Son of Light has decided to defend him. The Son of Light has forgiven him—no, he’s trying to forgive him. He’s such an innocent and kind man… to the extent of foolishness. He’s doing that despite what he had experienced…” a juror chimed in.

“…”

“…”

“What do you think, Alex? You already know what the majority of the jurors think, right?” Kennen asked.

“Well, they’re not wrong, Kennen,” I replied.

“…”

“The next site is just ahead of us. After entering the Republic, we found evidence that Father Lee Ki-Young had devoted himself to that damned criminal. Despite getting beaten up every night, Father Lee Ki-Young still couldn’t help but find him pitiful. He’d wake up at dawn and prepare food for that damned criminal,” I said.

“That bastard,” Kennen said.

“However, his kindness was repaid with violence,” I added.

“…”

“The payment he received for his dedication were ruthless beatings and torture. That bastard treated the Son of Light like he was some slave at the black market. At this point, I don’t think the mastermind behind his actions still matters.

“It doesn’t matter whether his actions were a result of Templar Simon’s orders or Father Yohan’s lies. The truth is that he’s evil, Kennen. He’s like a demon who derives enjoyment from deceiving people. He makes people pity him before repaying their kindness with violence.

“Even if Father Lee Ki-Young ends up forgiving him, we can’t forgive him,” I explained.

“It was just the first trial…” Kennen remarked.

“I don’t know if holding more trials is worth it. Anyway, what do you think, George?” I asked.

“Well…” George trailed off.

“Yeah?”

“There’s a group that has been contacting me to vote that Gen is innocent,” George confessed.

“What?” I was astounded

“Calm down, Alex. I looked into them because I was curious about them, but it was meaningless. I have been silent until now, as I don’t want to cause any trouble, but there are many of them out there.

“It’s highly likely that they’re the Templars or Father Yohan’s spies, but I don’t really know what they’re trying to do here,” George explained.

“Did you accept their money…” I asked, sounding hesitant.

“Of course, I didn’t. I would accept it if I were still the same old me years ago, but… we’re talking about Father Lee Ki-Young here. I can’t betray him.

“He’s someone who deserves to be treated with respect and dignity. The Son of Light had saved the world, and I don’t think he deserves beatings and getting locked up in a desolate building as his reward for saving the continent.

“We’ve received plenty of help from him, too,” George said.

“…”

“Whenever the continent was in danger, we were always with him. We’re also witnesses to his life story and epic adventures,” George added.

“…”

“Do you remember what the Shield of Blue shouted while he was being dragged out of the courtroom? He’s right. We must do what we can do. We have to make that demon pay for his sins,” George said.

I had always thought of George as a bit of an airhead, but it seemed that he was capable of saying something awe-inspiring from time to time.

I immediately nodded at his words.

The majority of the jurors were shocked upon seeing the horrific scene.

“That bastard…”

“He deserves an extreme beating.”

“That bastard is a demon.”

I couldn’t agree more.

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1. Alex’s POV ☜

CHAPTER 947
TRIAL (6)

'Fuckin' bastard.'

Asshole.

'Demon-summoning bastard.'

Jerk.

'Jin Cheong, you jerk.'

There was truly no one on my side.

'In the end, people really are alone in the world, damn it.'

It felt like Ji-Hye noona, Park Deok-Gu, and Kim Hyun-Sung had turned their backs on me. Jung Ha-Yan and Han Sora weren't around. I assumed they were enjoying their time with the new recruits, who had disappeared under mysterious circumstances.

The jurors looked strange, so I assumed that they had been bribed or something.

Perhaps the build-up to this point was *too* perfect.

The series of processes that would undoubtedly transform Gen into a criminal was making me feel suffocated. I started wondering what it would have been like if I had left out at least one of those processes.

If I hadn't left a note when I got kidnapped…

If I hadn't stayed for such a long time in that desolate, abandoned building…

If I had avoided that strange incident in the city…

Those incidents popped up in my mind, but I knew better than anyone that regret

was meaningless at this point.

'It was too perfect. Too perfect, damn it.'

The way Jin Cheong was sitting with his chin raised arrogantly made me feel angry. I was annoyed by his attitude, as he was basically telling me that he was going to win in the end, no matter what I would do against him.

It was like he was telling me that I could struggle as much as possible, but it wouldn't matter because I was in the palm of his hand anyway. He looked satisfied and smug; he also looked like he was finally relieving the stress that had accumulated over the years.

'Ah, he's really annoying. Damn it.

I had to say something because I couldn't ruin the second trial.

"It was all because of his twisted concept of belief. If you've sinned, you must take responsibility for the sin that has twisted your feelings for Goddess Benigoa.

"Templar Simon and Father Yohan had taken advantage of his belief to control him. They used his desperate wish of wanting to stand beside Goddess Benigoa, transforming him into a puppet. Must he take responsibility? Must he be blamed for his desperate feelings of wanting to serve Goddess Benigoa?" I asked.

"It is undeniable that he committed a crime," Jin Cheon said casually.

"It was a mistake. It's true that he had made a mistake, but it doesn't mean that he had sinned," I argued.

'He did *drink, but he didn't drink and drive, damn it.'*

"Father Yohan and Templar Simon are the ones who must take responsibility for his mistakes. The independent Templars are the ones responsible for the incident, and the suspect is nothing more than a small cogwheel in their grand scheme," I explained. "…"

"I'd like to ask if a scapegoat is what you really need or if you're looking for someone to vent out your anger. Let's think about the mistake William the Mage had made two years ago.

“Let’s talk about that incident here. All William did was cast a spell and throw it at the designated place, but he ended up destroying a village due to the Magic Tower’s mistake. At the time, no one held him accountable,” I said.

Framing Templar Simon and Father Yohan was the only way I could win here. It was an outcome I had been building up since the first trial, and I happened to have a good precedent.

“Objection, Your Honor. Father Lee Ki-Young’s example has nothing to do with the current case,” Jin Cheong argued.

“Objection overruled. Please continue,” the judge said.

“The observers of the Magic Tower and the signalman on duty at the time ignored the protocols and were promptly punished for the deaths of those civilians. No one blamed William. No one. They actually comforted him and sympathized with his pain.

“How is Templar Gen different from him? All he did was carry out his tasks like he always does. I believe that’s faith and a path to reach Goddess Benigoa; he simply carried out the holy mission he has received,” I explained.

The problem was that this statement was flawed.

I glanced at Jin Cheong and saw that he was shrugging with his arms spread out exaggeratedly. I bit my lips because he looked like he knew I was going to deploy this card against him.

‘This bastard already knows what I’m going to do.’

“Father Lee Ki-Young’s statement doesn’t make sense, Your Honor,” Jin Cheong argued.

“…”

“Haha. He sold his rosario of the Goddess Benigoa to the black market. Do you consider that as faith in Her as well?!” Jin Cheong yelled.

‘This asshole.’

“He abandoned Goddess Benigoa, Father Lee Ki-Young. How dare you try to defend the one who had sold their rosario to the black market by saying that their actions are born from faith? You’re *too* innocent,” he said.

“D-Do you have evidence?” I asked.

“We have a copy of the ledger that shows how the suspect had sold his rosario to the black market. I’ll submit it as evidence, Your Honor,” Jin Cheong replied.

“It’s the ledger of the black market. It’s unreliable evidence, and it cannot be submitted as evidence,” I argued.

— How disgraceful, Lee Ki-Young.

“You can’t submit something like that as evidence, Commander Jin. Got it? How dare you fabricate evidence.”

“Templar Gen had sold his rosario for three hundred and fifty gold coins to buy a new identity and everyday supplies. My statement does make sense. How dare you accuse him of throwing away the symbol of the Goddess when he was doing it for his mission of faith?

“The Vatican surely knows what the rosario means, and you can’t claim that he committed a crime for the sake of his faith,” I said.

“Where’s that rosario? The evidence has to be clear. Even if that ledger is real, we can’t say for sure whether it’s the same ledger that contains information about Templar Gen selling his rosario,” the judge said.

— This must be the only thing you have up your sleeve, Lee Ki-Young. Did you really think you’d be able to buy time with nothing but a rosario?

“It’s not over yet, Commander Jin. You’re too relaxed and complacent.”

— What a ridiculous bluff. Don’t think I’m going to fall for it.

‘You’re right. I am bluffing, damn it.’

“You’re the one who’s really disgraceful, Commander. If you didn’t bring proper evidence with you, then you shouldn’t have submitted any evidence in the first place.

You're so disgraceful showing off with half-assed evidence. Was that the best you could do?"

— I don't think the jurors think that way.

I felt like I'd instantly look away as soon as my gaze met with any of the jurors, so I simply rolled my eyes and caught a glimpse of the jurors' shocked faces. The religious jurors were especially affected. It was understandable, as I was basically arguing that Templar Gen had sold his rosario to fulfill his mission of faith for Goddess Benigoa.

'Damn it.'

— You would have had a chance of winning if you had won over the religious jurors. What a shame.

"I said it's not over yet, Commander. You've really put your guard down. Don't tell me you've already forgotten how you ended up losing everything after acting like this the last time we played this game? I guess you've forgotten, as you were resurrected."

— You only talk big because you're scared.

"From my experience, losers talk big as well."

— *Hmph.*

What kind of reaction was that?

"Anyway, let's see if things really go your way. We'll see."

— I don't care what kind of tricks you have up your sleeve. The evidence is clear, and you can't possibly wiggle your way out of this.

'He's right, damn it. I don't think I have a way out of this.'

The evidence was clear, and everything was going his way.

Just like the first trial, I couldn't achieve much in the second trial. The defense was in a hopeless state for quite a while now. It was to the point that they suggested we go with getting a reduced sentence instead.

'No, we have to win no matter what.'

Jin Cheong's way of talking changed drastically upon realizing that he was winning, and I could already imagine what was going to happen as soon as I lost this trial. He'd get on my nerves every day with that arrogant face of his, and he'd provoke me every day by mumbling that the trial was easier than he thought.

"The defense's argument makes sense. It's not clear enough of an evidence," the judge said.

'Nice.'

"Look, Commander Jin. How dare you submit such a useless item as evidence? Hey, Commander Jin. You think the court is a joke? You think the Sacred Democratic Country's courthouse is your playground or something?"

— It's only a matter of time. This is just a minor accident that will not affect the overall trend.

He looked calm right now, but he definitely couldn't see this as a "minor accident." I was certain of that, as he was a perfectionist, after all.

He was right. This "minor accident" would not affect the overall trend, but this "minor accident" meant that there was a flaw in his argument.

Once he found out that I was trying to frame Templar Simon and Father Yohan for this case, he definitely wouldn't be able to ignore this so-called "minor accident."

'He's acting like he's calm, but he's bothered by it.'

"The trial is adjourned and will resume in two days," the judge announced.

— The next trial will be the last one, Lee Ki-Young.

"You mean it'll be your last trial*, Commander?"*

— I don't know how much time you can buy with that card, but since you desperately want to buy some time for yourself, then I'll play along and give you some time.

'Stop talking nonsense. I know you're really worried. You're nervous right now despite pretending like you're not. You should know that since you've already tasted what it feels like to get stabbed in the back. You will play along and will desperately try to find that rosario first.'

I hadn't said anything about it, but…

'I need to find that rosario before him.'

It'd be best if I ended up obtaining that rosario in the end.

Actually, there was something else that would be truly the best.

'It can be said that I've already lost.'

Everyone was aware of that as well.

The jurors no longer listened to me. The denizens and the religious figures of the Vatican were all taking their anger out on Templar Gen. The series of events was just so perfect that I couldn't see an opening at all, which infuriated me.

Even if there were an opening, I'd also be pressed for time.

'Damn it, I'm gonna lose. I'll lose at this rate.'

"Sub Guild Master," Kim Mi-Young called out.

"Yes, Miss Kim Mi-Young?" I answered.

"I'm sorry for telling you this… but about our suggestion—"

"No, I don't want a reduced sentence. We have to win this case no matter what," I interrupted.

"I'm sorry for my lack of skills," Miss Kim Mi-Young said.

"No, you're doing more than enough," I told Miss Kim Mi-Young.

'I did it a bit too well. You didn't do anything wrong. Being able to come this far is already a miracle, and I feel bad because she lost a lot of weight over this case.'

“Please find the rosario first. We must move faster than that Republican beast. Head to the black market right now, and I’ll dispatch… Lee Chang-Ryeol and Belier,” I instructed her.

“Yes, sir.”

“Additionally, please prepare for the next trial with the defense. You don’t have to report every little thing to me. Do what you think is best, Miss Kim Mi-Young,” I added.

“But—”

“I haven’t given up on the trial. I need to find a way to win,” I interrupted her.

To be exact, I had to find a way to turn the tables; this wasn’t just about winning and losing anymore. I thought about it many times, but I thought this was the most reasonable method available to me.

If I couldn’t win, then I couldn’t let Jin Cheong win either.

I had to make sure that he’d lose as well.

‘Damn it.’

It was an ambitious outlook, but it would allow me to commit irresponsible acts without any hesitation.

It was 2:33 a.m., and I realized that this was the only way.

Just like that, I had no choice but to visit our Hyun-Sung.

“I’ll get straight to the point, Mr. Hyun-Sung,” I said.

“Yes?”

“Please help Templar Gen get out of here,” I requested.

‘You understand what I’m saying, right? Help him escape from prison. I know you can do it.’

“I won’t meet him ever again,” I added.

‘If you do this for me, I won’t hang out with him anymore. I’ll only hang out with you.’

“Please help him live freely. I beg you,” I said.

‘I’ll cut ties with him and you’ll be my brother again. We’ll be best friends with a strong bond. If you help me with this, all of that will be yours again. You’ll get it back. I know that I’ve been neglecting you recently, so I’ll give all of that back to you.’

It was a trade that even elementary school students would find childish, but the corner of Kim Hyun-Sung’s lips quivered slightly at my offer.

CHAPTER 948
TRIAL (7)

How was I supposed to interpret that expression? If I had no idea what Kim Hyun-Sung was thinking, I would have been confused. It was kind of blunt, but I had to say something as soon as possible.

"You're not allowed to kill him."

'I'm sure he won't kill him right away. Don't cut off his limbs.'

I couldn't help but think that he had become a cold-blooded person.

Was he still under Doom Hyun-Sung's influence, or had he truly gone crazy because of stress? I trembled at the scary thought that Kim Hyun-Sung had finally gone crazy. I had no idea why, but I was suddenly reminded of the time when he stabbed me in the stomach.

'Shit. That was really painful… '

However, I couldn't express that because I was glaring at him with an uncompromising and determined look. No words were necessary from me, as I knew he had already deduced my thoughts.

'Don't break him out of prison and then send him to Goddess Benigoa afterward. You can't kill him, man.'

The clean-up would be really hard if he were to do that.

'You understand, right? I know how you feel, but this conversation is over. As long as you break him out of prison, it'll be like Gen had never even existed in the first place.'

"I want you to break him out of prison unharmed," I requested.

"…"

“Please do it discreetly,” I added.

“Mr. Ki-Young, he—”

“Yes, you’re right, Mr. Hyun-Sung. However, he’s been suffering as well. I’m crossing the line here, but I can’t just let him die like this. As you said, he did hurt me, but…” I trailed off.

‘You hurt me, too. You stabbed me.’

“…”

“…”

“Would you like to come in for a moment?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

“No, it’s already late. Also…” I declined.

“…”

“I know what you’re thinking and what you want to tell me, but it won’t be enough to convince me. I’ve already made a decision, so I beg you,” I said.

“…”

“As I mentioned earlier, you must not kill him…” I repeated.

“…”

“I’ll assume that you’ve accepted my request,” I said.

“…”

“Also…” I paused.

“…”

“Thank you as always, Mr. Hyun-Sung,” I told him.

‘Let’s smile a little because it’ll be effective here.’

Kim Hyun-Sung didn't answer, but I believe he'd make the right choice. There were probably many things that he disliked about the idea, but there was no way he would refuse my request.

After all, it was a request from a friend who had sacrificed his life for him.

Anyway, he just had to accept my request, and he'd be able to get rid of Templar Gen somewhere I couldn't see, and our bond would return as well.

Under normal circumstances, if one wanted to obtain something, then one had to sacrifice something in exchange for it. I was sure Kim Hyun-Sung was aware that he needed to focus and make a choice.

Rather than wasting his time on meaningless revenge, he probably thought he needed to take care of and protect his friend. Obviously, I preferred a trade with no losses, but there was no way Kim Hyun-Sung would reject me.

'Even if he doesn't like it, he'll do it no matter what. He'll do it even if he doesn't want to do it.' The most important thing in the world for Kim Hyun-Sung was our lost bond. *'In addition, it would be strange for him to refuse the idea, but he does have a record of causing a mess and threatening to kill others.'*

Anyway, the next thing I had to handle was Gen.

'The trial isn't as important anymore. I was never really interested in the trial.'

I started comforting myself, saying that the result would have been different if I had given my all during the trial. I wasn't interested in competing with Jin Cheong in the first place, so I simply decided to look for a more reasonable way to deal with the matter.

What was actually good for the continent?

At this point, what was really important?

I had to go back to the beginning and think about it. I had no choice but to keep thinking about the answer to that question. Was that trial really *that* important to me? Was the trial actually meaningful?

The battle of our petty pride wouldn't do me any good in the future.

‘I’m different from that bastard who only knows how to play games.’

I was a saint who’d always prioritize the interests of the multitude rather than my personal greed.

‘There’s a reason I’m the Saint of Light.’

The petty fight about whether Templar Gen was innocent or not and the jurors’ decisions weren’t important.

The extermination of the group known as the Templars, clearing the Mole Saint’s Cozy Sanctuary, stopping the anomalies happening throughout the continent, and dedicating myself to the job of ensuring that the multitude would live a peaceful and happier life…

These were the tasks I had to do as the Saint of Light, the Honorary Cardinal of the Vatican, the Manager of the Continent, and lastly, as a human being.

‘I’m built different—the essence of my existence is different from him.’

There was a massive difference between Demon Summoner Jin Cheong and the Saint of Light.

‘Let’s place a location-tracking artifact and a spy camera artifact on Goddess Benigoa’s statue, as there’s only one place Templar Gen will go upon escaping. There’s a chance he might go elsewhere, but his priority is to save the weak Saint of Light.’

It was only natural for him to know that he needed the power of a group rather than the power of an individual. There was no other group he could turn to except for them, and it was all because he didn’t have any connections.

I nodded and quietly called out, “Mr. Gen.”

“Mr… Lee Ki-Young?” Gen asked.

“Yes, Mr. Gen. It’s me,” I replied.

“What brings you here… when it’s already so late?” Gen asked.

“I’ll get straight to the point since I don’t have a lot of time,” I told him.

“What?”

“I-I think I can help you get out of this place,” I said.

“Excuse me?” Gen asked, looking confused.

“I decided to get help,” I informed him.

“What? What do you…”

“I can’t say more, but—”

“What are you talking about, Mr. Lee Ki-Young?!” Gen interrupted.

He sure was loud for someone who was dying, but it was understandable.

He looked like he couldn’t understand what I was saying, even though I simply told him that I was going to get him out of here. The public’s opinion had already turned against him, and I was sure he was aware of the fact that winning this trial was hopeless.

His reaction was understandable, and he definitely assumed that I made some kind of deal. He definitely thought that way, but he couldn’t figure out what kind of deal I had to make.

I could have sold my freedom, or it could have been a political deal. Even worse, it could have been some kind of cruel deal that I couldn’t tell him.

In reality, I was just going to hang out with Kim Hyun-Sung more often than usual, but Gen’s wild imagination was advantageous for me right now. I took advantage of that and revealed a weak smile, showing him that I had long gotten used to sacrificing myself and that I was okay with it.

“You don’t need to sacrifice yourself. All of this… is solely my—”

“I’m fine, Mr. Gen,” I interrupted him.

“I’m not fine, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. For someone as worthless as me…” Gen paused.

“No, you’re not worthless. You showed me a bigger world and what the continent

truly looks like. You broadened my worldview, and you even gave me several gifts," I said.

"…"

"…"

"Honestly, all of this was because I was selfish. You probably think that it's all your fault, but that's not the case at all.

"I've always been dreaming of it. Perhaps I've always wanted to go out and see the beautiful world out there. I know that it was wrong, and I know that the ending was going to be horrible, but I ignored it because… I was happy," I explained.

"…"

"I clung to the joy of being able to see a different sky every day and my precious daily life was just too precious for me to just let it go. Of course, perhaps I also ignored it because I was worried that something bad might happen to you," I said.

"You did nothing wrong, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. This is my fault. I'm the one who ignored everything that happened afterward. I told you that I'd show you a new world, but perhaps my desire to become free was even greater than your desire to see the world.

"I did it all for myself, not for you…" Gen confessed.

"You're a kind person," I commented.

'Idiot.'

"I'm not as kind as you think! I'm… a disgraceful man! This is all because I'm selfish!" Gen exclaimed.

"…"

"I didn't do it… for you," Gen added.

I couldn't tell whether he was lying or not. I knew that he was projecting himself onto me, but I was convinced that he was lying to me right now. He definitely didn't

do all that out of selfishness.

However, it was undeniable that he was having mixed emotions right now. I didn't really mind it, as I believed that he'd start thinking about me a lot from today onward

"None of that matters, Mr. Gen. I simply did what I thought was right," I said.

An always steadfast honorary cardinal. A saint of unshakable faith. Sending Gen out was just the beginning, and the battle was bound to be tough and long. It would be a tough, drawn-out fight against the hidden evil of the continent, and it was going to start from the faction war within the Vatican.

"Leave and go to a place where no one can find you, Mr. Gen," I instructed him.

"What…"

"Father Basel will soon declare a holy war on the Templars," I revealed.

'It's me. I'm going to declare it.'

"I'd like to stop it if possible," I said.

It was already impossible to stop it, as the faction war within the Vatican had gone on for too long to be stopped. Moreover, I was just one person; there was no way I could stop an entire war by myself.

It was like a pus that had been festering for a long time had finally popped up.

It'd basically be a purge.

"Many will die, and there will be a lot of bloodshed," I told him.

"…"

The only thing I could do was try to prevent it. Actually, I knew I couldn't stop it and that my efforts would be nothing more than a futile struggle. However, I wouldn't be the Saint of Light if I didn't lend my hand to those who needed a helping hand.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young, you don't have to…" Gen trailed off.

'No, you know the truth as well. My power as the Honorary Cardinal of the Vatican was necessary to minimize the damage of what was about to happen.'

It felt like a twist of fate. This was the epic story of the Honorary Cardinal of the Vatican fighting against a greater power for the sake of the continent, the Sacred Democratic Country, and in the end, for the sake of a pious believer named Gen.

"Run away as far as possible," I told him.

'Don't leave; just crawl back into your home, man. Go back to where your Templar friends are right now.'

"You must forget everything about the Sacred Democratic Country and the Vatican," I added.

'Don't forget. You must not forget what the Vatican had done to you.'

"You must also forget about me," I told him.

'Don't you dare forget about me, damn it. Have a debate or something with the remaining Templars out there.'

"Don't look for me again," I said.

'I'll probably look for you myself.'

"T-This is my last gift," I stuttered as I extended a small necklace toward him.

It was the best gift ever, featuring a location-tracking artifact, a spy camera, and a bug[1]. Of course, I was confident that he wouldn't notice those features.

The necklace had an engraved gem depicting Goddess Benigoa, and it was my final gift to him as Lee Ki-Young, so I was sure he'd treasure it.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young! Mr. Lee Ki-Young!" Gen shouted.

"…"

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young!" Gen yelled.

"…"

'Don't look back. I've gotten used to break ups, but I might still end up crying if I look back.'

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young… please… please!" Gen begged.

I have to keep walking for a while, and then I'll stop for a moment to look back at him.

"…"

I came to an abrupt halt and looked back at him, saying, "It was fun."

"…"

"*AAAAHHHH!*"

"…"

"*AAAAHHH!!*"

The next morning, I heard a loud and obnoxious alarm.

— LEE KI-YOOOUNG!! You bastard! You crazy fool! You piece of trash! You disgraceful and nauseating fool!

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1. A bug is a concealed or disguised microphone to overhear conversation ☜

CHAPTER 949
TRIAL (8)

— Lee Ki-Young, you bastard! It's no use pretending, you rat!

Kim Hyun-Sung had done his job perfectly. I had doubts whether he could play the role of an assassin, ranger, or thief, and I was sure that doubt was due to the fact that he had the typical swordsman image.

'But I don't think he left any traces… '

I expected nothing less than that from a regressor.

I assumed he had done a similar mission in his past life because his past life was quite troublesome, unlike his current life, where he was walking down a smoother path. I was sure his experience in his tumultuous first life had helped him immensely.

Actually, I wouldn't be surprised if he had built a reputation in the underworld.

'It was a difficult task.'

We were talking about the underground prison of the Vatican here, after all.

It would be easy for him to just break in and help Gen escape, but helping Gen escape without anyone noticing was difficult.

The continent's worst criminal had disappeared overnight.

There were no traces of mana, and there were no traces of holy power being as well.

A few people got injured, but no one died.

Templar Gen was the only one who disappeared. He managed to avoid the eyes of that demon summoner, who definitely was prepared for this kind of variable, so I could definitely say for sure that…

'He's no different from the continent's number one assassin. Shit.'

He definitely got himself a second job advancement for what he had done.

If Kim Hyun-Sung were the one who kidnapped me instead of Templar Gen, no one would find me ever again.

I peeked outside and heard a loud voice.

"What the hell were the Holy Knights doing?!" Father Basel shouted.

"I'm sorry," a knight said.

"Father Lee Ki-Young… where is he? Was he…" Father Basel asked.

"Thankfully, we confirmed that he's in his room," the knight answered.

"You must tighten up the security. You have to protect Father Lee Ki-Young with your life. He might come back for him," Father Basel ordered.

"I'll keep that in mind," the knight said.

"Is Father Lee Ki-Young aware of what happened?" Father Basel asked.

"He's probably not aware of it yet," the knight replied.

"What do we do…"

They prioritized security, and there were quite a few people worried about me.

'It's only natural.'

Criminals had the tendency to return to the scene of the crime.

Gen's crime had ended up in failure, so there was a chance that he'd come back to take me away again. I saw Holy Knights standing near my room, and I also saw members of the Blue Guild.

Just as I thought that they'd soon enter my room, I heard knocking on the door.

“Hyung-nim,” Park Deok-Gu said.

‘Damn it, it’s the pig.’

“I don’t want to see you right now,” I said.

“H-Hyung-nim…” Park Deok-Gu mumbled.

“If there’s something you want to tell me, tell Jo Hye-Jin to come in,” I instructed him.

“All right,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“Sir, it’s me,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

“Come in, Miss Hye-Jin,” I said.

Jo Hye-Jin, Park Deok-Gu, and Kim Ye-Ri entered the room.

‘Go away, you pig!’

When I glared at Park Deok-Gu, he immediately flinched. He looked like a rain-soaked puppy.

I eventually stopped glaring at him, and he quietly took a seat. It had been a few days since the trial, and we were still in the middle of a cold war. I could already deduce why the guild members had come here to visit me.

“So… what brings you here?” I asked, going straight to the point.

Jo Hye-Jin nodded and replied, “Templar Gen has vanished.”

I already knew that he was gone, but I still pretended to be shocked.

I entered a state of denial and looked at Jo Hye-Jin as if I couldn’t understand her words.

“…”

“…”

“What?” I asked.

“Like I said, Templar Gen disappeared, sir. The Vatican is investigating all the Holy Knights who stood guard during the estimated time of his disappearance. They are still trying to figure out what happened.

“The Magic Detection Unit and the rangers were dispatched to investigate the scene, but they haven’t found any traces at all,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

“Ye-Ri… have you checked the scene?” I asked.

“Yeah, but there weren’t any traces of mana or holy power. He probably just used brute force… I can’t really explain it… but there’s no one on the continent capable of doing that.

“This must be the work of an assassin with a skill to erase traces, or perhaps they have a skill that allows them to conceal their mana. The latter is an attribute that has never been recorded on the continent just yet, or at least I’m not aware of anyone with that kind of attribute.

“Chang-Ryeol oppa is currently investigating my former assumption… but if that isn’t the case, then it’s the work of someone unknown to us,” Kim Ye-Ri explained.

“We believe Templar Gen has yet to escape the Vatican. The Vatican and the Blue Guild have determined that we need to focus on protecting you more than tracking him down, so we’re planning on staying here to protect you in the next forty-eight hours.

“It is going to be uncomfortable, but…” Jo Hye-Jin trailed off.

“…”

“Sir.”

“…”

“He’s a criminal,” Jo Hye-Jin continued.

I frowned because the idea that I’d have guards so close to me sounded annoying, but it seemed that Jo Hye-Jin had misunderstood me.

“I completely understand how you’re feeling, but you can’t deny the crimes that he has committed. The guild’s Investigation Team believes that the Templars are behind his escape,” Jo Hye-Jin added.

— You coward! Are you… not feeling embarrassed at all? You shameless bastard!

‘Ah, our commander is so loud.’

“I’m sure there was some kind of reason he approached you in the first place. I know it’s heartbreaking, but…” Jo Hye-Jin trailed off. Then, she nodded and added, “You don’t have to sympathize or empathize with him.”

“You were tricked, hyung-nim,” Park Deok-Gu chimed in.

“…”

“You can tell if you just think about it a little. That jerk fooled our hyung-nim to take advantage of him. I don’t know what those Templar bastards are going after here… but if Templar Gen really cared about our hyung-nim, he wouldn’t have disappeared without a word.

“I’m sure he’s up to something, but don’t worry. I’m going to stay right beside you until the day I die,” Park Deok-Gu said.

‘Get away from me and give me my coffee.’

“And… we discovered a suspicious place, sir,” Jo Hye-Jin informed me.

‘I know.’

It was all because Templar Gen was basically telling me his location in real time.

Honestly, I thought it was kind of late because it had been quite a while since I assigned the task to Rafael’s party and those children.

I wasn’t sure if he had missed his chance to tell me, if he was too occupied by the sudden kidnapping case, or if he was busy purging Father Yohan and the remaining evildoers, but I was honestly happy that he completed the quest I gave him.

“There’s a high chance that it’s the dungeon you mentioned before. I’m sure Templar

Gen and his conspirators are inside that dungeon. Rafael's party and the investigation team of the Black Swan Guild have been dispatched, but there's nothing to report yet," she said.

"Templar Gen…" I mumbled.

"That jerk is probably there. I'm sure they're coming up with some sort of unimaginable plan. The anomalies happening on the continent are getting worse… and the reason he kidnapped and tortured you was definitely to delay us from dealing with the anomalies.

"You are the protector of the continent, after all. He's probably trying to get rid of anything that might get in his way," Park Deok-Gu said.

"Mr. Gen is—"

"Sir," Jo Hye-Jin interrupted me.

"Yes?"

Jo Hye-Jin looked pretty cautious as she asked, "Can you tell me exactly what happened when you were with him?"

"I don't want to talk about it. I testified everything in court," I replied.

Park Deok-Gu and Kim Ye-Ri exchanged glances.

They stepped back, thinking that we were going to have an important conversation.

"I'm sorry to tell you this… but you might have been brainwashed or hypnotized…" Jo Hye-Jin said.

"What?"

"There were no signs of mana; not even similar artifacts were found. You said you're okay, but you were already experiencing mental issues even before the War against the Outer Gods, so there's a chance that you've been hypnotized by him," Jo Hye-Jin explained.

'Hypnotism? Really, Hye-Jin? Have you been reading some weird novels lately?'

“Sir, I’m being very serious… right now,” Jo Hye-Jin added.

‘What kind of novels has she been reading these days?’

“No, it’s nothing like that so don’t worry. I was simply thinking about him as a human being. I have more good memories than bad memories now,” I told her.

“……”

“I’m going to enter the dungeon as well, so please be prepared,” I instructed.

“No way!” Park Deok-Gu shouted.

“I have things I need to handle for Benigoa’s sake,” I explained.

“Stop talking nonsense! It’s because of that Gen or Gwen, right?!” Park Deok-Gu yelled.

“…”

“If it’s truly because of Goddess Benigoa, then you don’t have to do that. The continent has plenty of talented people—”

“Hye-Jin noonim is right,” Park Deok-Gu interrupted Jo Hye-Jin.

‘Let me set the mood first. A serious face and atmosphere always helps.’

“I just… I just want to see it with my own eyes,” I said.

“Hyung-nim…” Park Deok-Gu mumbled.

“I want to know the truth and what’s real… I still believe him, but I think there’s something wrong. There might be something… in that dungeon,” I told them.

— Lee Ki-Young, you coward! You losing like that…

‘He’s being so loud.’

“What? Is something wrong?”

— What you did was just…

"Did you get the rosario?"

— The rosario?

"Now that I think about it, I heard Templar Gen broke out of prison."

— Don't act like you don't know.

"How can you do this?"

— What?

"You should have just said something if you think you're going to lose. You're so scared of losing that you even ruined the trial where I was winning…"

— What? You arrogant bastard! Put your hand on your chest and think about what you just said.

*"*I *was going to win, you dumb commander. You knew I was going to win, so you went ahead and did* that*. The secret weapon I prepared all night long is useless now. Thanks to you, the situation has gotten even more complicated… Haa…"*

— Bullshit. Stop talking nonsense, you bastard!!! Secret weapon? Secret weapon? I know every single detail of your plan. That useless and meaningless rosario is in my hands; you can only make so many objections, and we've prepared a counterargument for every single objection of yours!

"I'll forget about it since I'm not the type to dwell on the past."

— Don't make me laugh, Lee Ki-Young. You're so shameless. Don't… Don't contact me for personal reasons from now on.

"Is it okay to contact you as long as it's about business?"

'Aren't you going to play games with me? You're really not going to play with me?'

"Don't be like that and get ready to enter the dungeon. This isn't for a personal matter."

— What?

"It's a pretty big dungeon, so prepare yourself. Come to think about it, do you have any knowledge about clearing dungeons?"

'What are you going to do now? This game is a really, really fun one.'

—…

"We'll quantify the dungeon's clear results and convert them to points. We'll duel, and the winner is the one with the highest points."

'It's a duel. It'll be really fun. A battle between brains. A battle between a prodigy and someone with mediocre talent.A battle between the symbols of the Sacred Democratic Country and the Republic.'

Obviously, I had a bit more of an advantage, but games were more fun if one had an edge over the competition.

"If you're not going, then I'll take Hee-Ra noona with me. In the meantime, you can just catch up on your work. As I promised, I'll make sure to give you a massive fund for your project. I'm expecting… good results."

—…

— I'll…

"Yes?"

— I'll play with you one last time.

"…"

'This guy… '

"I've decided to convene a meeting. Please summon all the guild members," I ordered.

It had been quite a while since I met all the guild members.

PDF by: traitorAIZEN